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# THE SMOKE AND THE FLAME



# The Smoke and the Flame

A Study in the Development of Religion

BY

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*Author of "The Coming People," "The American Citizen," "The Religion of a Gentleman," "The Theology of Civilization," etc.*

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## **Dedication**

**TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO LOVE THE NOBLEST TRADITIONS AND MEMORIES OF THE PAST, AND WHO THEREFORE ALL THE MORE RESOLUTELY SET THEIR FACES TOWARD THE GRAND TASKS OF THE PRESENT AGE AND THE SHINING IDEALS OF THE FUTURE.**



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## THE INTRODUCTION.

I HAVE wished in this little book to present, in a simple and popular form, and at the same time with some suggestiveness, I trust, for thoughtful readers, a sketch of the process of the growth of religion. I have tried to answer the perplexing question how it can be that the one word "religion" has covered the most repulsive as well as the most inspiring facts of history, the grossest superstitions as well as the most rational and exalted idealism.

The history of religion has been a wonderful development, like the history of art, of science, of government. We cannot understand the religion of our own time, much less know what we ought practically to do with it, and to which side, party, or church we belong,

unless we know something of the long world-processes through which religion has passed into its various modern forms.

The clew to the general line of my thought is everywhere suggested in nature. Any useful plant or tree,—the vine, for example,—when first found in its wild state, is apt to yield sour or bitter fruit. Though all the possibilities of the most luscious grapes are wrapped up in the wild stock, yet they wait dormant. The soil must fit them; they must have centuries of culture; fortunate experiments must bring to light new and sweeter varieties of the vine. A constant interaction goes on between the outward conditions, or environment, and the developing grape nature.

Now the development of the life of religion follows this familiar analogy. Religion, like all vital things, depends upon the interaction of outward conditions and its own native life forces.

There is something of the nature of religion, for example, in the heart of a savage people, like the American Indians. But the Indian is confronted with the external world in its sombre and terrible aspects. His world seems to be tenanted by obscure and dangerous powers of darkness and evil. Its mystery overpowers his mind. He has no science to reduce its warring forces to unity. He is surrounded by other savage people with whom he lives in fear. The brute and cruel outward world of dread and darkness reacts upon the savage's religion, and helps to give it a wild and bitter flavor.

In general, no high form of religion can possibly live in the midst of ignorance and barbarism, or, if it can live so for a time, it can be for only the few, like some rare species of bird which occasionally finds its way in the short summer into the arctic zone. The character of religion varies with the



degree of the intellectual enlightenment and the civilization of the people among whom it is found. The vital quality of a religion also reacts upon the civilization of an age or a people, and modifies its character. Science, commerce, the arts, liberty and just institutions, the means of human welfare, popular education, large friendly intercourse among nations and the civilizing spirit of co-operation,—all these conditions foster the life of religion; and under all these conditions, as I shall hope to show, the reactive force of vital religion is the essential stimulus, without which they could not continue.

We have here the secret of the study of comparative religions. We have the key to understand the singular differences of the types of religion which have gone under the Christian name. We can unfold the historic processes through which Christianity, like all other religions, has passed and is still

passing. We can examine the various kinds of environment to which it has been subject, and learn what climates and soils have acted upon it to its hurt or even to its destruction, and what other climatic conditions have tended to bring out its characteristic quality. We may discover periods when, to all appearances, unfavorable conditions weighed upon it like a polar night; and other periods again, when the vital nature of the plant asserted itself, and burst forth into blossom and fruitage. We ought surely to read the history of religious experience to some practical purpose. We ought to learn better than men ever could know before out of what sort of moral climate and soil the fine flavor of genuine religion best comes to perfection.

It must be obvious that the meaning of religion has immensely expanded in the course of its development. What else could you expect? The meanings

of all human terms are growing larger. Man's thought of the universe cannot therefore remain as it was before Copernicus and Darwin.

The most noticeable fact in the thought of religion, as civilized men conceive it, is the effacement of the lines which once separated the world of nature from the supernatural world. Religion is no longer in a border or twilight land. It is true that the known and the visible always lose themselves in the unknown and the invisible, as the ocean passes over the horizon beyond our sight. But the unknown and invisible are here and within us,—in the atoms of matter, in the fact of force, in the mystery of love, in the miracle of consciousness and life. And so, likewise, the things which we most solidly believe in as real—force, order, intelligence, beauty, goodness, everywhere rising into manifestation wherever we open our eyes—have no border or

limit. Beyond our sight as here, they are everywhere to be depended upon and trusted. As a friend's face and smile, his words and action, reveal the person behind them, so the one divine person stands everywhere revealed in his universe, in smiles and tears, in all great words, in all the deeds of love, in the solemn but glorious march of history. God is not outside of his world: he is always in it, the life behind all things which move.

I may seem to some to speak in the language of what is coming to be known as "the monistic faith." I do not understand that the recognition of a certain twofoldness in nature is in the least incompatible with this monistic thought. There is an outward world of things which we see and weigh and measure,—the world of phenomena which physical science contemplates. There is an inward world, quite as real as the other, in which honor, justice, mercy, faith,

hope, love, are the immeasurable facts. I see no two worlds here, as if the one realm of values were opposed to the other. I only see two aspects of the same universe. The visible world represents and incarnates, as it were, the invisible reality. All that I ask in the name of the unitary conception is what Browning says of the man and his body,—

“Nor soul helps flesh more now than flesh helps soul.”

I suppose this was what Paul meant when he wrote that “all things work together for good” to them that love God. The outward and the inward thus constitute together a divine universe.

I used the word “faith” in a former paragraph. The fact is that all religion and civilization, and science too, proceed by the means of faith, that is, trust or confidence. This is not blind or unintelligent faith. It is the crowning gift

of intelligence. The reason is always making its splendid leaps and ventures from the things which it sees and weighs over the border to the new things upon which it grapples, in order to bring them also into the unity of truth. It springs from the falling apple to the conception of moving worlds, from fire on the earth to the flames of Sirius, from the observation of certain weights and proportions to ideal atoms and molecules. It is faith which conceives that the world is orderly through and through; it is faith that you can construct a Panama canal; it is faith that the world moves on the lines of progress and betterment; it is faith that popular government can be made to work; it is faith that men are capable of education and civilization. This is all of a piece with the faith in God. Why should we believe in all kinds of splendid possibilities, except upon the strength of a faith that the universe itself is pledged to bring them to pass?

I wish to make it quite clear that the religion of civilized men must be almost wholly different from most of the forms which religion has taken in the past. Most religions have been characterized by the egoism and selfishness of their worshippers. In other words, they have been the religions of childish natures, who used religion as a supernatural means for getting advantage for themselves. Sometimes, indeed, they have sought highly refined and spiritual forms of gain; they have prided themselves upon hours of devotional ecstasy, when they have seemed to meet God face to face. They have imagined themselves God's favorites on the ground of these exceptional states of vision and personal communion. The history of religion shows that there is nothing so subtle as spiritual egotism.

We proclaim a kind of religion which almost wholly alters the old emphasis and changes the earlier values. Its em-

phasis is not on what a man can get for himself: it is on what he can get as the member of a family of brothers; it is even more on what he can give and contribute toward the welfare of the whole household. The man has not caught sight of what life is who does not see the ideal of the City of God, the society of mankind, which he is set here to do his part in establishing. Distrust any form of religious emotion which seems to make you God's favorite, or to mark those who enjoy their particular ecstasy as "a peculiar people." Religion has, indeed, many forms; but it comprehends all mankind, and offers its best gifts without exclusion or special privilege to all men on equal terms. Its law is one, as we shall see: give your life, that all others may have the more life. Whoever catches the meaning of this deep law has the veritable religion.

In one sense all this is very old. The few have enunciated it. It gleams out



of the lives of the ancient teachers. Nevertheless, it is still for the most part new and unfamiliar. You cannot identify it with any historical form of religion. Very few conceive this to be the substance of Christianity. Most Christians would define their religion in other terms. No great church has ever yet been organized to proclaim this new religion.

Meanwhile, no one can easily exaggerate the magnitude of the changes which are taking place in the religious life of the world. It is as if "all the fountains of the great deep were broken up." There is every reason why this should be so. The thought of the thinkers, for at least a hundred years, has been diverging from the standards of the old creeds. These creeds reflected the conditions of a kind of society which is now passing away. The early Christianity hardly differed more widely from the forms of faith

which it superseded than the faith of modern men is coming to differ from the forms of historic and dogmatic Christianity.

The charge may be urged that I have made too optimistic a conclusion to my work. I have not been forgetful at all of the tremendous considerations which urge men in their weaker and specially in their egotistic moods to become pessimists. I have no pleasure in hearing those who tell us that pain does not exist, and bid us make light of bereavement. I know what it is to feel "the burden of the weary world." Indeed, I am profoundly impressed with the conviction that a solemn law of cost is in the warp and woof of the universe, and that in some true sense, "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth"; in other words, that in the infinite life there is an element of sorrow, without the presence of which love itself could not be complete. May it not be

that in all noble suffering, as in the flights of joy, we participate in the life of God!

The question of optimism seems to me to be simply the question of the reality of God. "If," as Paul says, "God be for us, who can be against us?" Either the theistic faith lies at the very foundation of the world, or else the whole structure of life breaks off into insignificance. Either science and civilization follow the line of intelligible, purposeful movement, or they have less meaning than the motes in the air. Either human laws, liberties, ethics and humanities are founded in an eternal order of righteousness, or else they are like the bubbles which children blow for sport. I cannot believe that the reason, inspired as it is to discover everywhere order, unity, and significance, can ever rest in anything less than the faith in an infinite and eternal reason and goodness. This may be a

solemn and serious faith; but it is instinct with hope, both for the individual and for mankind. This hope grows as the man who possesses it grows more unselfish and generous. I am not ashamed that the study, the experience, and the thought involved in this little book ensue in such an optimism.



# The Smoke and the Flame.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A BIT OF HISTORY.

LET us journey back upon the wings of the imagination through nineteen centuries and visit ancient Jerusalem, as a pilgrim might have seen it in the age of Jesus. We will crowd through one of the narrow gates of the great city wall, and go straight to the temple, shining with polished columns and brass and gold. Herod's gigantic work of rebuilding it is still going on. The great space of the temple area is divided into courts. There is an outer court, across the inner limit of which no Gentile, or foreigner, may venture to pass. There is a court

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for the women, where they must stay by themselves. The court for the men is separated by another barrier from the region of the high altar where the priests are ministering, clothed in gorgeous robes.

There was always something going on in the temple. Men who had vows to perform came there with their unkempt beards and long hair. Parents to whom children had been recently born came to make their sacrifices and to bring gifts to the priests. Let us imagine that we have come upon some high feast day. There is chanting and weird music. The temple is full of smoke and incense. Fire is on the altars. The sacred light shines out from the splendid candlesticks. Suppose it is the day when the high priest in the stately dress of his office passes within the inner shrine, the Holy of Holies, to hold converse with God. Who could have failed at such a moment to feel

something of the solemn awe of the time and place? Who would not have been swayed by the impulse which moved the crowd to throw themselves upon the ground in worship?

On the other hand, there are sights and smells here in the gorgeous temple which shock and sicken us. The great altar of sacrifice, with its bloody offerings, reminds us of a slaughter-house. What are these pens, full of lambs and kids and young cattle, and these cages of doves? All these creatures are waiting to be sold as victims for the terrible altars.

So much for a hasty view of the temple worship, as Jesus must have seen it, when he first came as a boy with his parents to Jerusalem. It was spectacular and highly sensational. It consisted in outward rites and ceremonies. Its characteristic note was exclusion. It was for Hebrews alone. All others were thrust out as aliens. It was the



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religion of a dreadful and distant God who could be propitiated only by blood. Common men must stand away from his shrine. It was a religion of priest-craft, caste, and superstitions. The men of one tribe only could serve in its temple. And this temple was the one place in all the earth where the ritual of this religion could be celebrated. The religion of the temple was a local religion. Its law forbade the erection of a temple elsewhere.

We must now leave the temple, and descend through narrow streets into the town, and inquire our way to the nearest synagogue. It is nearly as plain as a modern Quaker meeting-house. If we come here on a Sabbath day, we shall find the simplest kind of religious service. There is no priest; there is no altar nor sacrifice. Some one, not a priest, but a layman, will read from one of the precious rolls of the law. The people will join in the prayers. Any

one of suitable age and character may address the meeting. This synagogue is one of a considerable number in different parts of the city. There are meeting places just like it in every town and village where Jews live throughout the Roman world.

The fact is, the Hebrew people had done precisely what we should do, if by some strange law, we were forbidden to build more than a single church in the United States, and if the regular priests or ministers had to be always in attendance at that one central cathedral in New York or Washington. We should have to give up church-going except on special occasions, and we should have to furnish some other simpler arrangement to meet our religious needs. So these Hebrew people, mostly coming to Jerusalem on great festal occasions, had built up for themselves what was practically another kind of religion. Wherever there were a handful of families,

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they met on their Sabbath day, partly for the sake of good morals and instruction in righteousness, partly because they felt deep religious needs which they wanted to express. They chose their own leaders, they appointed teachers, they sent their children to learn to read in the synagogue schools, they brought contributions for the support of their synagogues, and they provided for the poor.

Thus it came to pass that two quite different kinds of religion were observed by the same people and within the same city. It was almost as if you imagined Quakers in Rome holding their meetings every Sunday and at the same time remaining good and regular members of the Roman Catholic Church,—on one day discussing the observance of the Golden Rule with their hats on in the meeting-house, and on the next day carrying presents to the priests at St. Peter's and hearing mass. No one

seems to have seen any incongruity between the aristocratic and sensational rites of the temple and the democratic and ethical teachings of the synagogue. In fact, every one in the synagogue was taught to obey the priests, to keep the feast days, and to perform the required rites. Even Jesus seems not to have cared to quarrel with the priestly religion or ever to have withdrawn his own allegiance, as a good Jew, from the temple ritual.

Moreover, these two types of religion had gone on side by side for many generations. Read the stories in the Books of Kings, view the pictures that Ezekiel draws as late as the beginning of the captivity in Babylon, and you will catch some dim sense of the hideous barbarity of the early priestly religion in Judea. Human sacrifices were offered at the altars. Disgraceful orgies were witnessed within the ancient temple area. The religion of the Hebrew temple

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evidently went back to the same cruel and savage beginnings as the religions of Nineveh, of Sidon, of Mexico. Do we think the scenes of animal sacrifice brutal which Jesus and his disciples looked on? But we forget what it had cost long before their time to pull down the time-honored Astarte poles on all the sacred hill-tops, to put a stop forever to human sacrifice, to clear the hideous idols from the temple, to secure purity of life on the part of the priests. The struggle for these ends had lasted through many centuries. The story of the civilizing of the Hebrew religion is one of the most memorable incidents in human progress. We can only refer here to a single phase of it.

In the eighth century before Christ there had arisen a group of men, among whom the names of Isaiah and Amos stand forever conspicuous, who practically taught that the religion of the

priests and the temple was needless. What need had "the God of the whole earth" of burnt-offerings and sacrifices? These great pioneers spoke in the language of a universal religion. They introduced the use of the word "Father" by which to name God. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth" (Ps. ciii. 13). "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?" (Mal. ii. 10.) They reduced the practice of religion to its simplest and most ethical terms. "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. vi. 8.) This high ethical sense rose out of a marvellous spiritual insight, as in Ps. cxxxix. 7: "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" Is it not clear that the men who had learned to use and repeat such teachings as these, while they might indeed continue to visit the temple and

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obediently bring their gifts for the priests, had ceased to feel any special need of priests or altars or temples?

The religion of the prophets — which is also the religion of the best of the Psalms, and which is found again in certain splendid passages in Ecclesiasticus and The Wisdom of Solomon — not only worked to civilize the hitherto savage temple ritual, but it also made the synagogue possible. In a very real sense the earliest spiritual religion was perpetuated in the synagogue. It is true that the religion of the synagogue was often formal and lifeless. It fell into the hands of a very punctilious Pharisee class, “the respectables” of their day. But it was by all odds the highest type of organized religion that the world had ever seen. We must never forget that Jesus owed to it his own acquaintance with the loftiest teachings of the prophets. Its Pharisees were not all hypocrites. Hillel, Gama-

liel, Nicodemus,\* Nathaniel, Paul himself, were its genuine fruits. Christianity was its child. The movement which Jesus led was the natural outgrowth of the free and democratic spirit in the old Judaism, bursting through the weakened shell of the aristocratic and pagan religion of the temple.

\* If we take the names of Nicodemus and Nathaniel to represent only literary portraits, the fact remains that such ideal characters appear to have been drawn from the life of the times.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE WORK OF JESUS.

WHAT did Jesus do for the world? What was his specific work which after nearly two thousand years still justifies the gratitude and affection of mankind? I can best answer this question by a homely illustration. Every one has seen a fire smouldering under green fuel. The fire itself is hardly visible through the dense, pitchy smoke that fills the air. But now, as you watch, you will see here and there little tongues of flame appear, more or less mingled with the smoke, and repeatedly drowned out by it, as if the smoke hated its own flame and were trying to subdue it. Wherever a tongue of flame is, there heat remains and tends to blaze again, and bright coals glow under the surface.

At last one sees somewhere in the pile a great clear, pure, white flame for the moment at least overcoming the black smoke and standing out in sharp contrast against it.

Here is our parable of the beginnings of religion in the world. The native, childish, barbarous human nature is the dense green fuel, which will not and cannot at once blaze. The fire is the divine heat in the soul of man. It is very little at first: it seems to struggle to find expression. Its early expression is like the smoke,—dark, chaotic, ineffective, even repulsive. The smoke is the religion of superstition, of priestcraft, idolatry, and base orgies. It goes off into spectacular show and sensualism. It is essentially selfish, and it lends itself to the use of tyranny. In short, the smoke in our figure stands for the aspect of man's religion in the time of his barbarism. How could the religion of childish or savage or selfish men ever

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have burned with the pure white light of good will and truth?

The tongues of flame which appear from time to time out of the smoke and then die away, are the good lives of early men into whose pure hearts the divine wisdom had entered, making them, in the words of the ancient writer, "friends of God and prophets." These men were in advance of their times, but they always blazed the way which after times should follow. Jesus' life is like the great clear flame which at last shone out to make plain to every one the real nature of fire. Henceforth it was certain that true fire was flame and not smoke, light and not blackness, beautiful and not dreadful, that its use was not to hurt or kill, but to bless men.

As Amiel has well stated, it must forever remain impossible to reconstruct or write Jesus' life. No one can be quite certain just what things he said and did. It is inconceivable that more

or less should not have been added to the current stories about him, while they were in the formative period. No one can tell what or how much material may have been added. This fact in our age is no longer of any special importance. No truth, in the modern man's thought, depends upon a precise answer to the question: Who first uttered this truth? Nevertheless, it is not difficult to make a sketch of Jesus' personality, as of some noble figure seen at a distance, and especially to discover quite clearly the emphasis of his teachings.

The fact is, Jesus' great teachings, to which he gave his life, are astonishingly simple. He taught an age which still stood in fear of the unknown Powers that the essential nature of God was goodness. The truest of all the names for God was "the Father." He surcharged this name, used by earlier men, with new meaning, never to be forgotten. He taught and practised the most

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direct access to this good God. You needed no priest nor temple nor any kind of mediation. God was as near to man in the privacy of his chamber as he was in the Holy of Holies. He was better pleased with the prayer of the humble publican than with the elaborate words of the conventional Pharisee. He did not indeed need that men should tell him what things they wanted. Was he not forever seeking the welfare of his children?

So far as we know, Jesus uttered no direct word against the elaborate machinery of the temple sacrifices. But what he taught made priests useless. The sole thing that hindered any man from enjoying peace with God was his own wrong-doing. Let a man, then, cease to do wrong, and begin to do right. Let him quite put away anger or greed, and begin to show good will.

The life of God was made perfect in

love, or, better, good will.\* Let man, God's child, enter into the life of the father, and share his good will. The essence of all Jesus' teaching seems to have consisted in bringing men to an active and efficient sense of the common humanity. To feel humanely toward men, and especially to act humanely, as if all were members of one family, was the heart of his religion. There were already gleams of this democratic conception of humanity in the prophetic religion. Thus we recall the beautiful story of the treatment of the Syrian army in 2 Kings vi., and also the remarkable teachings of mercy in the Book of Jonah. The parable of the Good Samaritan is all the more interesting for these foregleams which led the way to it.

In Jesus' time, as now, men asked

\* I prefer the use of the words "good will" to "love." We can show good will at all times and to all persons, but we cannot love at will. For love properly implies intimacy, approval, and warmth of affection. Love is good will in its highest form. It is better to keep the word for this more sacred use.

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what happiness was. Most men imagined it to consist in all sorts of acquisitions and possessions, in having riches and servants, and honors and titles. Some one of Jesus' biographers, if not Jesus himself, happily gathered into "the beatitudes," as into a string of pearls, the wisdom of all the centuries. It would seem as if these words were Jesus' favorite quotations and thoughts. In this remarkable summary, happiness is made to consist in modesty and in gentleness; that is, in a kind and friendly heart. Happiness is not with the warriors, but with the peacemakers. Happiness is with those who forgive their enemies; that is, who have no enemies. Happiness is in a hunger and thirst to be true and just. The heights of happiness are for those who have known sorrow and suffering. Other men had said such things, and the world had forgotten. Jesus and his friends said them, so that henceforth

children should learn them at their mother's knees. They were the prophecy of a new order of humanity.

In the common religion of Jesus' day as in the religion of multitudes now there were splendid ideals: men knew well enough what was right. You cannot find in literature more humane commandments than were embodied in the Hebrew books. There is no nobler form of the Golden Rule than that contained in the Book of Leviticus, xix. 18. The "lawyer" who questioned Jesus according to Luke's version summed up the substance of religion in the most masterly manner ever conceived in the two everlasting sentences concerning love to God and love to man. There was never any counsel of perfection more spiritual than the familiar tenth commandment. Whoever learned to obey that rule might be allowed to forget all the others. Why was it that, while men knew these fine words, they



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went on almost as if they had never heard them? The trouble was, first, that they did not see the relative values of things; and, secondly, that they made no habitual connection between their ideals and their conduct. They had a sense that justice was good, but they were equally certain that money was good. They made a habit of seeking money, but they made no such habit of doing justice. Social purity had its value for them, but all sorts of pleasures also fascinated them. They knew that truth was good, but few of them knew how good it was. Men lacked the habit of following truth and telling the truth, as they habitually followed their pleasure. The values of the body and the senses were all compared together in their minds, indiscriminately, with moral or spiritual values, like so many bright coins in the hands of a child, who, if he chooses at all, is more likely to take the big bright copper than the smaller piece of gold.

Now Jesus was a Master in the science of values. He taught that the moral values—truth, the pure heart, righteousness, love—were not merely so many desirable things which one might take if they fell to him, or go without if they cost too much trouble, but these things were of an infinite worth. How precious is justice? No amount of wealth will cover its value. At what point does it cease to be profitable to remain true to one's nobler self, to one's friends or one's country? He who asks this question does not know yet what love or truth is. With Jesus these things belonged in an infinite realm, of which all visible values were merely symbols. Jesus believed that man has a divine or infinite nature. You could assess the value of an ox or a sheep, but you could not possibly fix the value of a man's soul. Is not all hope of immortality—indeed, all rational ground of expecting human

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progress in this world—profoundly involved in this faith which Jesus had in the infinite possibilities of growth and attainment wrapped up in the nature of man? How much has Jesus' life been worth to mankind? The world has never been able to set a limit to its value. But Jesus knew that whatever precious thing his life contained was also in the common nature which he shared. He was utterly democratic in his thought and life.

Jesus' teaching culminated in the idea that the happy life is measured not by its income, but by its outgo. "It is more blessed"—that is, more happy, he says—"to give than to receive." I do not like to call this 'altruism,' much less to think of it as a doctrine of sacrifice. What Jesus teaches here is not the necessity of the loss of life so much as a certain wonderful doctrine about the nature, quality, and fulness of life. Whether consciously

or not, he had reached the most profound truth in philosophy. Life, indeed, is in a ceaseless rhythm of income and outgo; but the ictus of this rhythm undoubtedly must be upon the outgo, or expression. The outgo is not for the sake of the income, but the income is for the sake of the outgo. We do not live to eat, but we eat to live. The greatest of all delights is to turn on and exercise power, skill, art, intelligence, and, most of all, good will or love. Jesus' thought of the love of God was like the sunshine which pours itself out everywhere and upon all. The life of man, God's child, must therefore likewise pour itself out. If, in man's case, the light is only got by reflection, man's joy still is, like God's, not to absorb it, but to make it shine. When a man sees this, he has the secret of life. When all men catch this thought you have perfect, efficient, and joyous human society. But to see this

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and to do what this idea demands is not sacrifice: it is freedom. Or, if it ever seems to be sacrifice, it is the kind of sacrifice which the child learns who chooses on occasion to forego his play and to help his mother in her work. For the moment this seems to be sacrifice, but it is presently discovered to be a peculiar and lasting form of gain.

It has been said that the most characteristic thing in Christianity is the strange word that "whosoever would save his life must lose it." In other words, we must "die to live." But this is only an extreme form of the doctrine that human life belongs to the realm of the infinite and eternal, and has an infinite value. The man of honor or integrity knows what Jesus means; the patriot knows; the lover of truth, the real man of science, knows. Who of us is so mean as never to catch sight of the things for which, if ever the issue arose, we would willingly die? No one knows

life at its best who does not carry a willing heart to face death. In a true sense we "die daily"; that is, we spend constant physical cost to secure the things for which all physical terms are symbols or counters. Does not biology teach us that life itself proceeds by everlasting death and rebirth? Jesus' death set the seal of genuineness to his faith in this solemn and yet majestic teaching.

It is not important, as I have already suggested, to try to satisfy the question as to how far Jesus was original. The question is insoluble. There is not an item of thought which is not universal. In other words, just because it is true, men everywhere are capable of recognizing it. In fact, no man ever catches a truth who does not see it originally, that is, with his own mind, as each man sees a star with his own eyes, as if no one else had ever seen it. Jesus was like one who, climbing, had come to where he could see sun and sky and

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stars. Come, he said, stand with me, and see for yourselves. His highest and most spiritual doctrine was therefore thoroughly democratic. His most intimate friends were men whom the world called common. It was the secret of his originality that, with his great thoughts, he cared to talk with all kinds and conditions of men, and of women, too. He simply ignored the lines of caste and privilege.

Jesus' relation to the older worship of the temple rather surprises us. It is hard to see what use he could have had for it. But he never broke with it nor antagonized it. He seems to have performed its prescribed rites as a good Jew. His attitude toward it was like that of the early reformers toward the Church of Rome. They were not immediately ready to say that the altars and the candles had better be abolished, and the priests set to more useful work in behalf of humanity. So Jesus, who

could not bear to see cattle bought and sold within the temple, seems not to have been offended at seeing the same creatures slain as victims in the temple. Was he not approaching the point where, if they had not put him to death, he would have been obliged to take a stand against the whole time-honored system of superstition and priestcraft? Certain it is that Jesus' own religion, inward, spiritual, ethical, finding the presence of God on the sea and in the fields and among the mountains, seeking its expression in all beneficent and beautiful works of humanity, summing up its prayers in the words, "Thy will be done," was at least as different from the spectacular religion of Annas and Caiaphas as the religion of the Pilgrims at Plymouth differed from the religion of the mediæval popes.



## CHAPTER III.

### THE EARLY CHURCH.

THERE is no evidence that Jesus expected to found a new religion. He undoubtedly had his face toward a new and more just order of human society. But aside from a few passages in the New Testament, which might easily have been added to the collection of his sayings after his death, there is nothing to prove that he instituted an organization with forms and rites. He used the synagogue as he used the temple. He taught, after the ancient fashion of the East, wherever people cared to listen, by the seashore or by the wayside, or as men sat at table after a feast. Even in the story of his trial no charge appears that he was setting up a new religion, so closely had his teaching followed in

the lines of accepted and even familiar religious thought. Other rabbis knew these things. Jesus was ablaze with them. Others saw them and lost them again, very much as a dealer in old books might mislay certain of his most precious volumes through his ignorance of their value. But Jesus saw what things were central and essential, and kept them in the front. His religion must have seemed to him too simple, too practical, too open and popular, to need organization. Let every one tell it. Let every one practise it. What more could you ask ?

But Jesus' death precipitated a change. For one thing, it pressed Jesus' friends or disciples close together, and set them apart from others in a peculiar and tragic manner. People pointed to them as "those people who had been with Jesus."

Moreover, the strange stories about Jesus' resurrection undoubtedly gave

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to Jesus a new elevation in the eyes of those who credited them. It is not my purpose here to inquire into the possible origin of these stories. It is well known that the history of religion is full of the belief that from time to time the dead have reappeared as alive. Everything goes to show that the Jewish popular mind in Jesus' time was quite susceptible to this sort of faith. The sacred Hebrew books contained the account of various appearances from the realm of spirits. Jesus' contemporaries commonly believed in the activities of both angelic and demoniac agencies. In fact, as regards the expectation of and belief in marvellous cures and other startling possibilities the history of Jesus' time strikingly reminds us of a whole range of alleged "psychic" facts and experiences reported by many persons to-day. A phase or sect of religion is growing up under our eyes based wholly on the faith in just such an order of things as

constitute the miraculous features of the New Testament. No thoughtful person can consistently explain the one set of phenomena without throwing light upon the explanation of the other set. The same occurrences in both groups, which appear to certain minds highly important, seem to other minds somewhat unspiritual, while to others still they only represent an underlying general law that religion in the best sense means health and fulness of life. The body tends to respond to a happy and restful state of mind or soul. Aside from theories and speculations, it is certain that the stories of Jesus' cures of the sick, of his quieting those "possessed with demons" (as the men of that time called the insane), and, finally, of his own reappearances after his death \* rapidly went toward the crystal-

\* It is to be remarked that there is nothing in the stories of Jesus' resurrection that can be construed to the modern mind strictly as evidence or demonstration. Thus it is only the friends of Jesus who profess to have seen him after his death. It is related in Matthew xxvii. 52, 53, that at the hour of his death "many bodies of the saints . . . were raised," who after Jesus' resurrection appeared to many. Paul

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lization of the new religion. Here was one, people said, who held the supernatural powers in his hands, and whom death could not subdue. There began at once to be a separation between those who credited these wonderful stories about Jesus and those who set them aside.

More profoundly yet, Jesus' life had kindled the faith in God in common men's souls. His passion for righteousness, his sense of brotherhood, his high hope and enthusiasm, had lifted the temperature of the very ordinary human nature of the men who followed him — Peter and John and the rest — to the point of flame. This is the quality of fire. It not only blazes, but it makes others blaze too. Presently, we have groups of people meeting together, partly for the commemoration of the

naively claims that his vision of the risen Master, months after he had ascended to heaven, was quite as valid as the reports of those who were said to have eaten with him and even touched his body, while after his resurrection, he was with them in the flesh.

good master, partly for purely friendly and social purposes, partly in a glad new hope of the coming kingdom of goodness upon the earth. These little meetings were the beginning of what the world has known as the Christian Church. They did not even bear any distinctive name at first, and when a name was given them it seems to have been at first a word of contempt. They did not think of calling themselves by Jesus' name; but their opponents, who ridiculed the claim that the crucified Jesus was the expected Jewish Messiah or deliverer (in Greek, Christos), named them Christians, almost like the modern word "Salvationists." The fact of bearing a somewhat odious name doubtless served still further to separate the new party from their fellows. They spoke themselves of their faith as the "Way."

Let us try in imagination to visit one of the early church gatherings. We

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will go to the famous and rich commercial city of Corinth, where Paul has just collected a little congregation. We shall most likely find this church meeting in some upper room — perhaps in a sail-loft — in the poorest part of the town. If these early Christians could come into one of our modern churches, they might guess what it was; they would probably say that it was a kind of synagogue. But we, entering their assembly, would not probably surmise what they were about. We should think that we had come to the meeting of a club, where we should find them quite possibly in the act of eating and drinking together. We know from Paul's letters to them that their meetings were sometimes disorderly, and that rude men became intoxicated.

Some of these new Christians were Hebrews, who still scrupulously kept the Jewish Sabbaths and the other rites of their ancestral religion. Perhaps

they continued to go to the synagogue, as a Methodist of Wesley's generation might have gone to his parish church. It is pretty certain that, if any of them had gone to Jerusalem, they would not have failed to worship in the temple, just as Paul himself did long after he had joined the Christians. The better educated among these Hebrew Christians must have been rather shy of the company of the foreigners whom they met at their meetings,—people with whom a little while before they would not have associated.

If you can imagine a free church gathered in a mining town in Alaska, you will get some idea of the curious mixture of nationalities who would have made up Paul's church in Corinth. There would have been tradesmen and working people and slaves. We may suppose that they came from their day's work to their weekly Sunday night meeting, just as to any other club in



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Corinth. The common meal was the chief feature of the meeting, as in other clubs. Their Bible was as yet a very little one, perhaps merely one or two precious rolls of the Old Testament books. No book of the New Testament was yet written except certain letters of Paul's. No one called these letters a part of the Bible. They may have sung a hymn or psalm before they parted. There was the same democratic opportunity for members and friends to speak which we know prevailed in the synagogue. In fact, Paul was seriously annoyed by those who interrupted while others were speaking, or who spoke in a sort of hysterical ecstasy, "in tongues," which no one present could understand.

As one thinks of these heterogeneous gatherings of "come-outers," with scarcely a single common tradition to guide them, without any salaried officials of any sort, taxed at the start to help their poor and even to send money as

far as Jerusalem, with no prescribed ritual except the simple initiation rite of baptism of which Paul himself speaks almost slightly and the brief memorial of Jesus of which they partook at their suppers and perhaps at first whenever Christians broke bread together,—one can only wonder that this new form of religion survived. Wherein did its life consist?

The answer to this question is to be found in the splendid thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. Here was a simple organization which stood for pure brotherhood, good will, humanity, friendliness,—to use Paul's word, love. The love of man was really the love of God. The whole creation, Paul taught, had its consummation in the coming of the age of the sons of God. The new movement was inspired by a wonderful hope and enthusiasm. Over all was lifted the figure of a great human life,—the good master, who was

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believed to be the conqueror of death. These new Christians in Corinth and Ephesus had never seen Jesus. Paul himself seems never to have known him in person. All the more subtle was the fascination of the story of the ideal life of the man of Galilee, who had loved the people and called God his father, and had at last died praying for his enemies. This was a new type of love in the world. And now, they fondly believed, the master would soon come again. The world would be his, and no harm or loss could then ever befall his friends. Here was a faith to make martyrs, and it did make them.

I said that Jesus' life and teachings were like the pure white flame which bursts out of the smouldering fire. The flame reveals the nature of fire, as light, heat, power, and beauty. So with the great thoughts of God and man which Jesus had translated into the form of simple parables. The little groups of

"Christians," scattered through the Roman empire, had caught something of Jesus' flame, or fire. It showed itself in their love, their faith in God, their splendid hopefulness. It was in the purity of conduct which Jesus had taught and practised, in their faithfulness, in their honesty, in their obedience to the laws, in their ideal of the family life, in their mercy and humanity, in their democratic equality. Here a religion for all mankind was in the germ. Caste, priestcraft, exclusiveness, race prejudices, were ruled out here. The one God was the Father of all men. All were of one blood.

So much for the beginning of the simple church of the first century. Its main purpose as yet was only "to be good and do good." This was before any creed had been framed or any liturgy recited, while Paul himself was looked upon as rather a dangerous innovator by the more conservative men

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at Jerusalem. For these men had actually known Jesus, while Paul had probably never seen him.

One sometimes wonders what the history of the world might have been if the friends and lovers of Jesus had actually kept the Church on the simple lines which were first laid down. Was it necessary that the smoke of the ancient paganism should so swallow up the pure flame of love to God and love to man that for hundreds of weary years men almost forgot the very existence of that democratic religion which Jesus had proclaimed and Paul had organized into a system? Or must we believe that the world was not yet ready for the pure religion of brotherhood and good will? Did average men still love darkness rather than light, their deeds being evil?

The history of mankind shows the extreme difficulty of keeping pure gold in circulation. Men mix alloys with the

gold, and baser metals tend to drive the good gold out. We shall soon see that even from the first an alloy of supernaturalism and sensational expectancy entered into the thought of Jesus' disciples. The aim of Christian writers has generally been to claim the genuineness of the alloy on the ground of the purity of the gold with which the alloy was mixed. The time has come frankly to separate the gold from the alloy and to put the latter aside.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE RETURN OF PAGANISM.

WE have likened the early Church to a fire burning with a clear blaze. We have caught sight of the religion of good will gathering to itself little brotherhoods of men who believe in a good God, and purpose to do the things which men always do when they catch Jesus' thought of God as "our Father." We must be on our guard, however, not to idealize the early Church and the "apostolic times." What right, indeed, have we to assume that Peter and John and the others had suddenly become free of the prejudices and superstitions of their age? We may trace even in the New Testament the existence of certain elements which early threatened to obscure the pure flame of the religion of good will.

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Thus, for example, men generally expected the speedy coming of a spectacular judgment day and the end of the world. This thought was all abroad in Jesus' day. It may have helped to frighten men into the new religion, but it certainly hurt the purity of religion. True life is here and now, as God is here and now. "Where love is, there God is." You miss this ruling law as soon as you expect life to be somewhere else, and not here. Here, then, at the very start was a tendency in the new Christianity to become a religion of "other-worldliness." The men of Paul's time thought of themselves as shipwrecked sailors upon a raft. They lived in expectation of a miraculous deliverer who would sweep down and take them away from a wretched world. What was the use of exerting themselves to make such a world better? A *bona fide* religion of good will is normally translated into all forms of practical activity



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for furthering human welfare. How can men carry out such a religion who are looking for salvation by a miracle?

Moreover, there was a moral peril in the thought about the Mastership of Jesus, that presently possessed the minds of the new generation of his disciples. He began to be now conceived of as the coming judge, a rather terrible and supernatural being who should sentence the wicked to eternal torment. This idea soon beclouded the beautiful picture of the good shepherd, the man of infinite good will. How should the disciples any longer forgive "until seventy times seven," when they had now come to conceive of Jesus as a Master of wrath, visiting merciless doom on his enemies? The Book of Revelation is a tremendous illustration of the change of atmosphere from the genial remembrance of the man who forgave his murderers to a gloomy austerity gloating over the tor-

tures of the wicked in the lake of brimstone.

Was Christianity destined to be a world religion? Then its essence was in the note of brotherhood and democracy. Its God must be one who, as an earlier writer had said, "loveth all the things that are, and abhorreth nothing which he hath made." But the early Christianity presently began to be exclusive. It divided God from his creation. It filled space with demons, wholly evil and hated of God. It had its torture house, whither the very neighbors whom one met in the streets were sure to be sent. How could the Christians be asked to love those whom they believed their God hated? The pure religion of peace on earth and good will toward men was incompatible with these strange and cruel thoughts which survived from long ages of exclusiveness and barbarism.

There was further mischief in the

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early churches. It crops out everywhere in Paul's letters. The ideal of a church was contained in the familiar words, "Each for all and all for each." But men were already in these churches for what they could get for themselves. There was ambition, rivalry, faction, jealousy. There was a party who called themselves after Paul, there were disciples of Apollos, and there were simple "Christians." Men desired more than their share at the church suppers; and, after a very modern form of human nature, they seem to have talked in meeting for the sake of hearing themselves.

This is merely to say that people in the church were still the same sort of men that they had been a little before in the synagogues or in the heathen temples. Many in the churches had not yet caught the essential idea of a church. Many did not understand the beatitudes at all or the life of the Golden

Rule. They were like the men in a modern labor union, honestly reaching out their hands toward closer fellowship, hopeful of coming good, swayed by a true breath of chivalrous devotion, capable of genuine sacrifice, while at the same time they were still liable to outbursts of the primitive passions of egoism and selfishness. What would you have expected otherwise? How had there been time fairly to convert men to the splendid ideals of the religion of good will? How could men by the mere taking of Jesus' name catch the ethical and spiritual secret of Jesus? He had once said to his closest friends in one of their wrathful moments, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of."

We do not say that there was no beneficent flame in these early churches of Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome. We merely remark that much of the material for the fire was very green, and that

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the fire already began to smoulder and smoke. How many Christians to-day are sure that they love men well enough to have enjoyed belonging to one of Paul's churches and associating with his converts?

Let us now leap the space of more than two centuries, and see what Christianity has become in the time of Constantine, that is, in the beginning of the fourth century. The ripple of religious movement which at Paul's death could hardly have been noticed by any Roman historian as of the slightest political importance, which could not have counted more than a paltry few thousand adherents, and those chiefly from the servile classes, has now become one of the notable forces of the empire. A new religion has fairly come to birth. Men and women have gone cheerfully to the wild beasts for its sake. It has made its converts in palaces. Soldiers, judges,

and imperial counsellors have adopted it. It has its grand basilica, or church, in all cities. It has a hierarchy of officers and a mighty organization. The crafty emperor has now found it prudent to make it the religion of the state. Sunday is at last constituted a holiday. No Christian slave need now be hindered from attending the worship of his church.

What has this new religion done for the empire, that it should at last be clothed in the purple? At a time when old primitive religions were breaking up, and when strange and ridiculous superstitions were in the air, Christianity has offered men a serious and dignified faith; it has established a sound moral basis for society and the state; it has instituted a thoroughly popular mode of worship; it has refreshed the sanctions of the family life with a new purity; it has set forth before the world the ideals of

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justice and democracy which the extraordinary moral and religious genius of the Hebrew people had worked out through many costly centuries. These ideals, once seen in the vision of a few, are henceforth brought into the treasure gallery of mankind. We can see to-day how human the Bible is. But the old world had never possessed a book of such lofty morality or one which taught so authoritatively the tremendous contrasts of right and wrong.

Moreover, in Constantine's time the doctrine of the one God is now fairly taking the place of the current gross polytheism. God is still terrible, but he is just and pure. There is also mercy in God. A divine person in human form, it is taught, has actually come from God with his message. Obey what this Christ said, or obey what the bishops say in his name in the churches, and the Son of God will open paradise for you. Something

like this seems to have been, in outline, the thought about God which average men were beginning to entertain. We may be sure that average men had nowhere before possessed a religion with so much moral and spiritual reality.

We have called the religion of Constantine's time "Christianity." What kind of Christianity was it? Not the Christianity of the primitive Christians, least of all the religion of Jesus. Human institutions always grow, develop, change, and take on new forms. They adapt themselves to express the character of the people who in each age live under them. The institutions of religion follow the same laws of development as men's political institutions. We know that this was the case with the Christian Church.

Let us imagine ourselves in attendance at one of the great church councils of Constantine's reign,—for example,



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the famous Council at Nicæa. What are these excited churchmen discussing? Matters of mercy, justice, and human welfare? On the contrary, they are engaged in an abstruse metaphysical controversy as to the precise nature of the second person of the Trinity! We can hardly suppose Jesus to have understood what the issue was, so foreign does it seem to his manner of thought and his practical character. It was an issue fought out by wavering majorities, and finally forced to decision by courtly influence and through the intervention of the tyrannical emperor, with his threat of the degradation and banishment of those who voted in the opposition.

And who are these men who constitute the council, some of them hot to excommunicate their brethren, and others quick to change their votes under imperial constraint? What have they in common with the fearless but

gentle prophet of Galilee? What do they know of the religion of good will? What understanding do these great bishops from rich churches in Antioch or Alexandria show of the beatitudes? Grant that the famous Athanasius is the best of them all. Grant his honesty. Grant, if you like, that under his difficult language and obscure thought he had sight of a truth.\* But how uncivilized this fanatical theologian is in comparison with the unknown man, ages before, who had said, "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God"! The one word was in the universal language. All men must eventually say it in chorus. The other was to be a word of stumbling and offence, a shibboleth of intolerance

\* The author's point of view is of one who thinks that the Athanasian, or orthodox party, were perhaps feeling out after a truth,—namely, that Jesus' nature, and therefore the nature of all men, is one and the same with the creative life of the universe. Is it true to say that man is the child of God? If so, the Nicene Creed actually served to obscure this truth, rather than clearly to state it.

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and persecution, its grain of truth mostly hidden for hundreds of years before plain men could see what it meant.

What now shall we say of the churches which have sent their bishops to Constantine's council? Would Jesus have recognized them as founded on any teachings of his? It is not clear that he would have known, any better than Isaiah or Hosea could have known, what this new religion was. Had he ever contemplated the grand buildings erected in his name? When had he ever instituted a new order of priesthood as elaborate as that of the temples? What did the superstitious multitudes mean by marking all sorts of things, books and swords and women's ornaments, and even the actions of everyday life, with the sign of the cross, as if for good luck?

The fact is, the religion of the temple, the religion of an exclusive priestly caste, had fairly come back, bringing

its peculiar dress, and claiming vested rights and privileges of its own. It was already setting up its complicated ritual and allying itself, as in the old days, with the corruptions and despotism of a military state.

Come down a few hundred years more, and the change is complete. Visit Rome in the age of Dante or of Savonarola, and see now what has happened. The Church is the state, ruling men's bodies and souls. Lordly bishops and cardinals vie with princes in luxury and display. The men in power in the church are at heart the very same Pharisees and Sadducees who once stirred Jesus' indignation. You can match arrogant high priests with proud popes and the temple at Jerusalem with many a gorgeous cathedral. The ritual and the ceremonial, the tithing of mint and anise, and the taxation of the poor, are on a more colossal scale than ever. Everywhere the priest stands between

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the soul of man and his God. The Hebrew religion of Jesus' time was simple and merciful compared with the cruel, pitiless, persecuting hierarchy which now claims to open or shut the doors of paradise or doom men to hell. No one to-day can study a great church service in St. Peter's at Rome, and resist the conclusion that the name of Christianity for the larger part of two thousand years has represented in all Roman Catholic countries what Jesus saw going on in the ancient temple of his people rather than what he himself taught as vital religion.

The point that I wish clearly to make is, that the primitive, spectacular religion of sacerdotalism and aristocracy early captured the name of Christ. Men, indeed, often to-day claim a supernatural quality in Christianity by virtue of its prevalence in the world. "It must be of God," they cry, or it could not have extended itself everywhere.

But the religion which spread and prevailed, and dominated Europe, at least till the dawn of the modern period, under the name of Christianity, bore less outward resemblance to the religion which created the New Testament than it bore to Buddhism. A thoughtful Hindu, or Chinaman, or Mohammedan, visiting Rome in Dante's age, would not easily have discovered who Jesus was or what he had really taught. A little child brought up in one of the plain synagogues of Palestine before Jesus was born, would probably have been nearer to the understanding of Jesus' doctrine than most Italian children were at the height of the papacy. What did the Saracen naturally think of the Christian? He thought of him as a Past Master in selfishness, greed, avarice, cruelty, and brutality. What did the Jew think of the Christian? He thought of him as rapacious, insolent, vindictive, and merciless.

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There is no cause here for surprise. I am not saying that the world had become worse. I shall soon try to show that it was hopefully on the way to be better. I am not saying that all the "Christianity" which bore the name was as pagan as most of it appears. Where even the densest smoke is, there is fire beneath, which will by and by become a blaze. It was as if, when the ancient Hebrew stock, like somewhat seasoned wood, began to burn with the clear fire of Jesus' religion of good will, the master of the work had straightway heaped upon the new flame layer after layer of green wood fresh from the forests. The process was necessary. Not one stock alone, but all races must be sooner or later touched by the purifying flames; but the process seemed at first like the extinguishment of the fire. The smoke appeared to rise more densely than before.

We in America to-day understand

something of the costliness of the process of civilizing masses of new human material. We are receiving millions of immigrants from every quarter of the earth, uneducated to free citizenship, filled with prejudices and ignorance, only dimly conscious of the ideal of a democratic government. Nothing less than our faith in an eternal and righteous order of the world braces us to our task. We can therefore catch an idea of the Titanic forces working in the early centuries of the Christian era, when the people of every barbarous cult, of every degree of crass ignorance and ingrained superstition, in Asia and Northern Africa, in Germany and distant Britain, were hastily baptized into "the name of Christ." Many were slaves, blindly following their masters. Millions of them were vanquished nations, compelled by the sword to assume the religion of their conquerors. Often the fact was, as the prescribed rule was later among the



The first thing I noticed when I stepped  
 out of the car was the cold, crisp air.  
 It felt like a fresh blanket after a long  
 journey. I took a deep breath and  
 looked around. The city was alive with  
 the sounds of traffic and the sight of  
 people in a hurry. I felt a sense of  
 wonder and excitement. This was my  
 first time in a big city, and I was  
 determined to make the most of it. I  
 walked down the street, taking in every  
 detail. The buildings were tall and  
 modern, and the people were friendly  
 and helpful. I felt like I had found a  
 new world. I was going to explore  
 every corner of this city and see what  
 it had to offer. I was going to make  
 this my home.

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back again and ruled the world. There was not a country in Christendom in which the founder of Christianity would have been safe if he had lived and taught in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE LATENT FLAME.

THROUGHOUT human history the pessimists have always declared that the world was growing worse. They have always been able to make out a good case. They have cited the most obvious facts,—the startling, terrible, and sensational facts of their generation, the crimes, murders, and wars, the ostentation and luxury of the rich, the oppression and cruelty of kings, the greed and the pride of priests.

By a curious paradox, however, the wicked times have been the times of new hope. As far back as Sodom, the story is that a merciful man had appeared to pray for the doomed city and to found a righteous nation. The abominations in the temple at Jerusa-

lem and the oppressions of royal tyrants only set off in more splendid contrast the brave reformers like Amos, who foretold the coming day of justice. Was Jesus' world the worst age that had ever been? No. It was the most spiritual age that had yet been. The time had now come when the loftiest teachings could make converts and take an organized form. Was Dante's world as bad as he thought? Yes and no. All the wicked things that he related were true; but when before had a Dante been possible? Or when, at least in the Western world, had a poet of the ideal things of righteousness and spiritual love ever had an audience before? Who else had ever so nobly or mightily set the scale of eternal values before the minds of men?

The truth is, the pessimists are themselves a standing refutation of their own complaint. That the world is "worse" is testimony to the fact that

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light and standards and ideals have come to stay, that righteous men are here who know moral differences, and are sensitive to evil. Before spiritual ideals had come, in the age of the cave-men, we may be sure that no one ever complained that the world was growing worse.

When the spring is coming, you do not know it at first by the more noticeable facts, by the severity of the March winds or by the depth of the last snow-fall. You know it by the slow change of the sun's shadow on the dial. You know it by an almost imperceptible swelling of buds on the otherwise bare trees, by the movement of sap underneath the still freezing bark, by tiny blossoms which only the few can find, covered by the last snow. By such signs, scientific and certain, you know the incoming of the kingdom of heaven. We are not asking the superficial question: Was the world of the Middle

Ages growing wicked? We are asking a profounder question: Was light coming into the world? Was the spring sun daily rising higher? Did the buds swell? Or, to return to the figure of the former chapter, we are looking now for the latent flame, always working beneath the surface of the great unsightly mass of the green and smoky fuel.

The life of Augustine will be the first brief illustration of my meaning. Here is a man who surely speaks a very different dialect from that of modern men. He is not our ideal of a saint. He is a somewhat fierce lover of righteousness, but he has a glimpse of a new ideal for mankind. He thinks in spiritual, not material, terms. He is a type of man in thought and character whom you can scarcely imagine to have existed in Italy in the days of the Roman republic. It happens that the figure of Augustine rises conspicuously out of the history

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of the fourth and fifth centuries. We know that his influence and example shaped the lives of men for hundreds of years. But Augustine's best work, like most of the highest human effort, largely disappeared from sight. You do not discover the men of his austere type of piety by going to churches and cathedrals on fête-days. You do not know who they are by reading the lists of princes and bishops. You find them in their books or enshrined in the popular traditions of little towns. You cannot be sure that the saying of masses and the sumptuous, sensuous worship that went on in the cathedral were of any importance at all to these men. Their religion was not in churches, but in their own hearts.

Let us take another familiar type of the mediæval Christians. I mean the missionaries, like Saint Patrick and the men who founded churches on the shores of England and in the Scottish

Isles. We may not quite approve the kind of doctrine which these men proclaimed. We are certain that it was different from that which Jesus had preached. Nevertheless, here were men driven by a real humanitarian zeal to face all kinds of danger. Here were men reaching out the hand to foreigners and barbarians, and venturing their lives to spread their new and peaceful doctrines. The best of these missionaries preached a religion of mercy and forgiveness, and told the story of a God of love. It was not a very consistent story: the men who taught it had not altogether learned their own lesson. Nevertheless, here was a new leaven at work in the heart of Europe. Wherever it worked at all, it worked to humanize and civilize. Even though the doctrines seem barren and obscure, and when we know that the plain people could not have understood them, the fact remains that men of good will, quite after the type of



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Jesus' good will, moved by some high sense of duty as well as by a new love of their kind, appeared here and there like sparks, kindling the flame of good will in the hearts of other men. When the ordinary churchman or priest only stirred wild men to tremble and fear, when the chants and music merely thrilled them with a wave of strange emotion, the golden touch of these pioneers of the teaching of mercy must have always served to change men's hearts and make them humane.

Again, the story of Francis of Assisi shows how Europe was being quietly civilized in the worst of times. What bishop or cardinal helped in the slightest degree to set Saint Francis forth on his wonderful errand? Yet the great pagan church carried a hidden gospel. There were those who still told the popular tale of the man who spoke to women and gathered little children to his arms and lived with the poor and ate

with sinners. This story, this purely natural gospel, this ideal of the life of infinite good will, warmed the heart of the young idler about the streets of Assisi, and presently set ablaze thousands of simple men and women in almost every kingdom of Europe. There never was such a movement as this in the classic times. There had been nothing in the classic religions to start such a movement. The spread of Buddhism, with a somewhat similar evangel, seems to be the nearest historical parallel to this revival of the religion of good will under Francis. Perhaps no one in a thousand years had been born with a closer likeness to Jesus than this man revealed. There was more of the spirit of the beatitudes and of the Golden Rule in this single man than in the prayers and the masses of all the grand churches combined. Here was really as different a religion from that which the priests possessed

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as Jesus' religion was different from the religion which Annas and Caiphas celebrated in the Holy of Holies. The one religion was formal, outward, and hierarchical: the other religion was of the heart and for all men.

Moreover, Saint Francis's religion marked a new rise of the tide of human progress and civilization. Thousands of men learned humanity and mercy. Distant England felt the impact of the wave. Protestantism would hardly have been possible, were it not for the light that this gentle saint had kindled.

The story of the Waldensian church belongs in our hasty list among the signs of the life that throbbed in Europe quite beneath the stormy surface of history. It may be that Dr. Hale's beautiful story, "In His Name," somewhat idealizes the tender and simple religion of the peasants of the Waldensian valleys. But, as Jesus once taught men to discover in a human personality

that which was "greater than the temple,"—namely, the presence of God,—so we seem to find more of the vital power of the coming humanity and democracy (which is the spirit of God) among these persecuted "heretics" than in the legions of the Crusaders or in all the vaunted authoritative and orthodox Christianity of the church councils. For the Waldensians toiled and died to keep alive the tradition of a brotherhood of peace and good will, while the Crusaders killed and devastated, and the councils laid on men's shoulders burdens of dogma heavy to be borne and still difficult to shake off, even at the command of the truth.

Will any one of Protestant education be shocked if we now add to the number of the elements that helped to keep alive a humane religion, the cult of Mary, the mother of Jesus? I believe that this undoubtedly mitigated the savagery of the times. When the image

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of the friendly man of Nazareth had been lifted into the sky and enthroned as a terrible judge dooming his enemies to hell, men, and especially women, fled for refuge and mercy to the thought of this ideal woman, gentle, loyal, and forgiving. Thus the name of Mary came to represent and incarnate the lost doctrine of the humanity of God. The good Catholic who worshipped his highest vision of womanhood was drawing near to our modern conception of God. He was nearer also to Jesus' religion than those Protestants were who rudely thrust Mary out of their temple before they were ready to bring back a God whom men could love.

Let us now cite another sweet and genial and very real influence which helped to keep genuine religion alive, in spite of corrupt popes and quarrelling bishops and a clergy which had almost lost the understanding of the religion of good will. This influence did not

flow strictly from any Christian source. One might read volumes of mediæval history and not observe it. But perhaps we shall some day agree that it was one of the most potent forces that went to make our modern world. I refer to the subtle stream of noble thought which came out of the springs of the Stoic literature. There is, indeed, a list of classic names, beginning with Socrates and including the good emperor Marcus Aurelius and the slave Epictetus, with whom Jesus would have found himself at home. Under the Gothic and Arian king Theodoric, in the early part of the sixth century, there lived a man at Rome, Boethius by name, profoundly educated, high-minded, fearless, righteous, wise, truly great, who finally gave his life for his truth. Boethius, who knew the best ethical and spiritual teachings of the earlier period, interpreted them into a famous book of his own, "The Consolations of Philoso-

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phy," which, though little known or read to-day, seems to have been a kind of handbook of practical religion for many of the men who have had a hand in making history. Hundreds of manuscripts of it are said to be still stored in European libraries. Our own English king Alfred translated it into the language of his people.

While it is not known that Boethius was a Christian, his book plainly served to light up and explain the essence of the New Testament. To read it was measurably to revive the ancient faith in the religion of the beatitudes and the Golden Rule. Practical minds whom Thomas à Kempis could not feed, found in Boethius something of a genuine gospel, both of love to God and of the divine brotherhood of all mankind. Whoever will be "good," in the most simple and natural sense of the word, Boethius' book frankly teaches, is "a God." To be good is to

share the eternal nature. How like is this word of Boethius to the saying that Jesus once quoted from an early Hebrew psalm,—“Ye are gods,”—in answer to the complaint of his critics that he called himself a “Son of God”! This book touched men’s hearts the more because it was written in a dungeon by a man who was facing death. The brave ethical spirit of the noblest Stoics thus at last coalesced with what we are wont to call “the spirit of Christ.” The man, like Alfred, who could at the same time love Boethius and love Jesus, was already coming to be modern and rational in his religion. In fact, we have in the story of Boethius the short answer to the question: What had become of the precious thought and examples of the philosophers? They had never perished nor been forgotten. They were at work at the heart of Christendom, making the men better whose special task it was to lead and teach other men.



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Must we not also speak of the Jews as adding a vital element to the religion of the people of mediæval Europe? They were certainly ready to suffer and to die for their faith. It was a simple and highly ethical faith. Formal, conventional, and exclusive as it seemed, it preserved the teachings which had inspired Jesus and given Paul his rugged and vigorous character. It inculcated a loyalty and charity which preserved the little Hebrew communities in the face of repeated persecution. The lives of good and wise Jews in every ghetto must have shamed the lives of wicked Christians. The God whom the Jews worshipped was at least as near to the conception of the God whom modern men worship as was the God before whom they burned candles and incense in St. Peter's at Rome! There must have been rabbis whom we would prefer to associate with rather than with the high churchmen who de-

spised them. There were Jews to whose care men might more safely intrust their property or their lives than to the hands of most of their own fellow Christians. It is well known that Jewish scholars and thinkers often helped to teach Christians, and to translate into the thought of churchmen the wisdom of antiquity. The Jews were often physicians. They always kept learning alive in their schools. What loftier character did Spain ever produce than the Jew Maimonides of Cordova? Jews of this type surely helped to make modern civilization possible.

Meanwhile, through the blending of various strands of influence, Christian, Stoic, Hebrew, possibly Hindu also, there came about in Europe the mystic movement of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. No one can understand the later Protestant Reformation without knowing something of this new form of sacred flame which touched

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some of the noblest and most influential minds in every nation of Christendom. The familiar names of Tauler, Eckhart, and Nicholas of Basle stand for a considerable group of thinkers and teachers, whose spirit is still leavening the world. These people used the current doctrines and ritual of the church with a free hand, much as Jesus had used the conventional forms of his time and the ceremonies of the temple. As the essence of the religion of the prophets held good after the destruction of the temple, so the essence of Tauler's religion would have been valid if all the churches of the Rhine valley had been burned to the ground. His religion was not in hearing masses. Interdicts and excommunications could not impair it. It consisted in a certain state or mood of mind. It was in the harmony of the individual will with the good will of God. It showed itself in all forms of human

kindness. When the heads of the Church looked on and shared in deeds of cruelty and war, when their Christianity condemned men to death by the Inquisition, when the horrors of the torture chamber in Nuremberg went on unrebuked, here was a religion that risked all things and ventured to disobey constituted authorities in order to minister to the poor and suffering. These good mystics brought the message of a loving and present God. It was the very message which the age needed, and which hardly was found in the churches. It was precisely the message which Jesus had taught. So far as men apprehended it, justice, mercy, humanity, democracy, came with this thought.

Let us try now to sum up the religious situation in Christendom at the eve of the Protestant Reformation. In the outward manifestations of religion, in fetichism and witchcraft among the

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ignorant, in the pomp and gorgeousness of worship, in the vast ecclesiastical edifices, in the wealth and luxury of churchmen, in the universal combination of the Church with oppressive governments, in the tolerance of well-born and well-dressed crime, and the cruel intolerance toward the Jews and all heretics of however pure life, in the continual benediction of the Church pronounced upon fratricidal wars,—by all these tokens, we are compelled to believe that the name of Christianity, outwardly and for the most part, had come to stand for pretty nearly everything against which Jesus, as well as the notable pioneers before him, had contended. The showy popular religion was less gross than the paganism whose name it had usurped. It did not slay its victims upon its altars, but no form of paganism had ever been so bloody or vindictive. Its worship had enlisted the arts in its service, and com-

manded awe and reverence, while incarnate pride, caste, greed, selfishness, and inhumanity sat in the high seats of its temples and abbeys. What Buddhist or Confucian visitor travelling through Europe would have guessed that the religion in vogue was either humanitarian or spiritual? So much for the smoke and blackness over the great seething cauldron where mediæval civilization was in process of making.

On the other hand, we have found everywhere a latent flame of ethical life beneath the clouds of pagan smoke. Pure hearts kept alive the love of their fellows; brave men offered themselves to die for their truth; little brotherhoods were forming, as in the case of "the friends of God"; characters after the fashion of the good Stoics were at work for a nobler society. Innumerable signs of this sort prove that the world was not growing worse. On the con-

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trary, it was passing through a phase of its development, as the ages moved on toward "the manifestation of the Sons of God."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE OUTCOME OF PROTESTANTISM.

THE story of the Protestant Reformation has commonly been told as if in the sixteenth century there had been an actual return to primitive Christianity. I do not wish to under-estimate the importance of the Protestant revolution, but it is easy to mistake its significance. It was indeed a step in the enfranchisement of the human spirit. Luther and his fellow-reformers, in their appeal to conscience and reason, caught sight of certain vital principles which Protestantism never wholly forgot. In the establishment of various orders of churches, breaking loose from Rome, they struck a necessary blow at the exaggerated structure of papal ecclesiasticism. The Calvinistic system, both in



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its thought and its organization, was destined to carry a leaven of pure democracy, lifting every church member to the rank of citizenship in an ideal commonwealth. Protestantism proclaimed the doctrine of individual duty and responsibility. It was no longer enough to belong to an infallible church, to obey its rules, and to trust to its good offices to save men's souls. Each man must himself enter into a certain ideal relation with God. He must renounce his self-will, and obey, not the Church, but the voice of God,—his reason, his conscience, his love. The teaching of the reformed churches about "faith" sounds today difficult and confusing, but it was at least an attempt to bring every individual face to face with the facts of an eternal world and with infinite spiritual values. There was a sturdy ethical quality in the lives of the reformers. Luther himself was of a rude and almost boyish type of human-

ity. Zwingli, especially, was a modern man in the broad reach of his sympathy and his impatience of superstition.

And yet the Protestant movement has hardly one clear note of that which constituted Jesus' gospel. In Germany and France, Protestantism was almost poisoned at the root by the thoroughly aristocratic politics of the princes and nobles who embraced the new doctrines. In many quarters it was a political quite as much as a religious movement. It was dominated by the men who in their jealousy of rich abbots and bishops saw a chance to aggrandize themselves. The Protestantism of England won the kingdom through the wilfulness of the tyrant Henry the VIII. Presently all Europe was in the flames of a civil war. Luther himself, though the son of a peasant, looked on and approved the merciless slaughter of the starving German peasants who rose to claim human rights of their lords. Calvin

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could let Servetus be burned for a difference of honest thought. Who of all the reformers was fairly abreast of the ancient unknown Hebrew of the eighth century before Christ, with his simple message of justice, mercy, and reverence? Who of them all made men really believe that God was to be conceived of as a father? Who among them comprehended the two great commandments of the law? Who of them all believed the beatitudes or had entered into the mighty meaning of Paul's praise of love? Epictetus had a better and more practical religion than the reformers preached.

Meantime, as the great reformers pass away, you seek to measure the results of their work. In terms of civilization and humanity, what has mankind gained for all the fearful bloodshed of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? It does not seem at first even to have gained freedom of thought. It has put another

chain upon the reason in place of the bondage of church councils. It has set aside the worship of the saints, and set up the worship of a book. It appears everywhere to be full of the spirit of exclusiveness, bigotry, and intolerance. It still drowns or murders the wretched people whom it calls "witches." It still persecutes heretics. It allows all manner of inhuman punishments. It never withholds men from war, but blesses the sword and hangs battle flags in its churches. It sees oppression, and is silent. It lets slave-ships go on their fiendish errand. Wherein are its ministers specially different in temper and aim from the bishops and priests whose places they have taken? Where in all Protestant Christendom has the name of the minister of religion distinctly come to signify the man of good will, the man of the people and for the people,—in short, the man of the type of Jesus? There have been a few such

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men in all times. The Catholics had priests of this type. But such men have never constituted the prevailing or representative type of religion among either Catholics or Protestants.

The fact is, the course of history would have been different, and advanced civilization would have been the rule in the world instead of the exception, if the Protestant churches had ever been wise or good enough consistently to preach the simple religion of humanity and good will. On the contrary, it must be confessed that they have largely proclaimed a somewhat bare and scholastic religion of selfishness.

I am not claiming what Luther seems to have apprehended in his old age, and what many must have believed in the time of the Thirty Years' War, that the world had grown worse with the Protestant Reformation. I am only showing that, as with the mediæval church, so also with the so-called reformed

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churches, in the great outward manifestations of their religion you find little or nothing which Jesus or Paul would have recognized as the heart of their message. Formalism, superstition, ritual, avarice, pride, priestcraft,—the divers marks of the primitive barbarism gone to seed,—are still in the churches. The worship is less gorgeous and less aesthetic, certain gross abuses have passed away; but where is the life of religion? Would Jesus himself have been safe to come back and preach in Hesse or Prussia or London? Must we not still admit that the green wood for the most part only smokes, but does not blaze?

I said that Protestantism set forth one great enfranchising principle. It challenged the individual man to "strive and thrive," and climb. It declared him the child of an infinite destiny. At the best, he was the heir of eternal life. At the worst, he was so important in the divine

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plan as to deserve to suffer forever for his sins. No other man,—even the wisest,—no church universal, was responsible for the individual or could relieve him from his burden of duty. This extreme of individualism, as the Catholics accurately charged, meant a long era of schism, with church against church and “heresies” springing up wherever men wrestled with the problems of thought. There was a new significance in Jesus’ word: “I came not to bring peace, but a sword.” It was as if an army on the march, losing its way, had at last thrown out groups of exploring parties to find out where the main body should follow. Only in this case, for the want of any common countersign, they mistook each other in the darkness for foes, and had to wait wearily for the dawn before they could recognize each other as friends.

Let us try now to discern, in the course of the great Protestant movement, what leaders, if any, there were

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who were fairly on the track of a practical, humane, and, we might say, catholic religion. No one will ever be able to record the humble names of the men and women who in the darkest times and in every body of Christians held to the simple religion of being good and doing good. But it is easy to catch the figures of some of the notable men of this type. Dr. Watts, who wrote the hymns, was such a man. The temperate, modest, and "judicious Hooker" was a churchman of this order. Bishop Jeremy Taylor was another: his writings still warm men's hearts. Swedenborg, too, was a rare civilizing force, generations in advance of his times, whose universal teachings, in spite of all the quaintness of their coloring, ring true to-day. Some of the little sects represented an honest endeavor to return to what, as men fondly believed, was the original Christianity. The Moravian Church,



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for example, established a brotherhood with love as their binding principle. They were the spiritual children of a Protestantism before the Reformation, which was sweeter, simpler, and more ethical than Luther's Protestantism. Huss had died for it. The aim of the Moravians was to live as Jesus would have lived. They had caught something of the central meaning of his religion. They had instituted a missionary religion. What great body of Christians had ever dreamed of doing so "unpractical" a thing as obeying the Golden Rule? But the Moravians really took seriously the ethics of the New Testament.

The lives of some of the Anabaptists were radiant with true human goodness. The religion of good will seems to have risen to a higher efficiency among these despised and persecuted people, numbered only by thousands, than among the millions of the adherents of

the state churches of Europe. What nobler or more democratic man came to America than Roger Williams? The Quakers, or Friends, never had great numbers, and bishops and parsons looked down on them; yet we do not know who in all England possessed more of "the inward light" than George Fox or William Penn. What titled "Lords Spiritual," sitting in Parliament, were so modern or so humane in their thought or so practical in their conduct as these despised come-outers? We may smile at their peculiarities, but they were rare pioneers in the way of a religion of peace and good will. They moved and climbed while the multitudes only slept. No one today can doubt that, had Jesus returned to the world, he would have found himself at home with these despised sectaries rather than in the palace of the archbishop of Canterbury.

Another similar little sect has become

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illustrious in the making of America. John Robinson's congregation of Independents, persecuted by "Christian" authorities out of England into Holland, settled a colony at Plymouth in Massachusetts Bay. This tiny colony, decimated by hunger and privation, adopted a basis of fellowship in 1620, simple enough for men of the twentieth century, and left its impress of charitable purpose, of democratic spirit, and of hospitality toward truth, to last forever in the new nation. Here were men, whose fathers in Jesus' time were barbarians of a rugged, cruel and un-intellectual stock, who had now almost come into full sight of the ancient standard of justice, mercy, and humility. Here is Jesus' ideal of a fellowship of good will set up on the shores of a continent of whose existence he had never known. Who says that the world does not move?

Suppose we ask now, What was the

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most important movement in the interests of civilization in the eighteenth century? Shall we say the French Revolution? Shall we say the American War for Independence? What if it should appear that it was the Methodist \* revival of religion? The most profound need of the period was an awakening of humanity and faith in goodness, especially among the millions of the poor. Methodism, with all its extravagances and its conventional theology, was such an awakening. It was a religion for the people. It preached the doctrine of brotherhood. It lent itself to the making of democratic states. It helped to provide a new

\* I speak of Methodism with only a qualified admiration of its present wide-spread organization. Its original impetus seems long ago to have spent itself. It has hardly any characteristics different from those of other Protestant bodies. Its ministers seem no more devoted, unselfish, or responsive to new calls of duty than other classes of men. The time has gone by when to be a Methodist was to be identified with the cause of the poor. Methodism has, in fact, followed the law which has generally ruled the institutions of religion. In proportion as the organization has grown powerful, and as its leaders have emphasized authority, orthodoxy and usage, they have forgotten what their institution was for ; and the life of religion has drooped.

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spiritual tie which bound men together. It was a modern reproduction, under the name of the Wesleys, of what Francis of Assisi had stirred the world to do. Such tidal waves of the flame of a new social feeling may seem to recede, but they never leave the world quite as barren and selfish as it was before ; for new points of fire have been kindled, which will not die.

So much by way of reminder of a few of the truly vital religious movements which have marked the development of Protestantism. In one aspect this development seems to have resulted in a wearisome series of sectarian divisions. More profoundly, however, underneath and behind this divisive tendency the conviction has grown that the highest life of religion is not to be found in the past, but in the future, that the Golden Age is yet to be, that the kingdom of heaven is before us, and that the work of mankind is to bring it to pass. On

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the whole, and at its best, Protestantism has cherished hope and the spirit of prophecy. Romanism might subsist as the religion of stationary races and backward peoples, or as the bulwark of aristocratic institutions. The destiny of Protestantism, however, was to move and grow and pass over into something better and universal. The spirit of reform, of free thought, of justice, of liberty, of growth, which once made Protestantism possible, now commands every Protestant communion to march on or else to die.

## CHAPTER VII.

### FROM CHANNING TO HUXLEY.

THE nineteenth century has been noted for the immense growth of the material resources of the world. But it has been equally wonderful for the gain of mankind in spiritual power. Where will you find a century that was so spiritual in all that constitutes a civilized religion? It is true that the form of its religion was quite different from what had been counted religious by the priests of the earlier systems. We must agree, however, that in reality, in the consciousness of the presence of a good God, in the sense of the oneness of the human family, in the deepening of all the bonds of sympathy, there never was so much religion as in the century just closed, which many still believe to have

been an age of peculiar materialism and infidelity. The truth is that all the arts and inventions of the age have compelled men to act in close co-operation. Fierce and unbrotherly as has been the industrial competition of the nineteenth century, yet its very oppressions have forced both employers and employed into stricter bonds of union. Far away as an equitable and humane co-operative order may be, yet constant experience has proved that men are made to co-operate, and that even the most gigantic schemes of selfishness are bound to obey at least the form of the sovereign law of social unity. At the worst, and when nations have fought each other, we have learned that they now pull together with a marvellous urgency upon the purses, the energies, and the heart-strings of all other nations, so that a revolution in China touches the money market in London and the industries of Chicago. What-



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ever makes for this closer co-operation among men makes for the religion of humanity. Co-operation is almost another name for religion.

Consider next the remarkable number of individual lives of devoted and unselfish men and women who in the past hundred years have appeared as the leaders of mankind in science, in the arts, in inventions, in philanthropy and moral reform, in education and statesmanship, in the teaching and exemplifying of ethical and spiritual ideals. These have been the heroes of peace, the pioneers of civilization, the organizers of a new and wider co-operation among men. Was Jesus the one man in Palestine in his day who loved God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself? Was there then one man only who cared enough for mankind to die for the sake of his love? But no one can count the number of those who have belonged to this order of the un-

selfish and disinterested in the nineteenth century. The century has not only produced scores of Lives of Christ which translate the fragmentary record of the occurrences of the New Testament into modern language. It has done vastly more than this through hundreds of authentic and thrilling biographies, relating the story of a new, most noble and practical species of saints, the true lovers and helpers of men. In the actual Christ-like deeds of an unknown multitude of humble and unrecorded lives the heroism and good will of the old times have been re-enacted before our modern eyes. What is the value of the name of "Christ" except that it serves as the symbol for divine goodness in human form? It has become so common for individual men to be willing to suffer or die for the sake of mankind that we do not even wonder at this kind of devotion. He is indeed a mean man

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who would deny this test of his manhood.

Among the great clarion voices which have proclaimed anew the gospel of human liberty and the doctrine of a divine democracy, Channing still rises pre-eminent. Let no one suppose that he cared for mere theological controversy. He was essentially a humanitarian. The vigor of his protest against an irrational theology was not so much on account of its intellectual crudity as because of its inhumanity.

The same may be said of other leaders of the great struggles of the century against slavery, against intemperance, for a wider education, for a fairer social and industrial order. If these men threw off the bondage of an incredible theology, it was because not only their reason, but their sense of justice and brotherhood urged them to a new thought of God. The issue was ethical as much as intellectual. Their

faith in a democratic religion was at stake. Theodore Parker, for example, was a true yoke-fellow with Channing in this grand struggle. He was at the same time a man of the people and a prophet of the coming reign of the people. He really believed, what many have only said, that all men are of one divine family. Here was "the religion of Jesus" in its simplicity in the man whom even Unitarian churches, still held in the bondage of ecclesiastical traditions, suspected as a heretic. Here was a man wonderfully like Jesus in his rugged good sense, in his unconventionality, in the depth of his moral convictions, in the intensity of his feelings, in his loyalty and his deathless devotion to duty and the love of man.

Was not this earnest humanitarian spirit which characterized the nineteenth century the same clear flame which had blazed up in Galilee and set the world on fire? The world had not

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rolled on for eighteen centuries in vain. The green wood that had been thrown age after age on the pile was at last beginning to be seasoned. The flames could not be forever quenched or turned into smoke. Inhumanity could no longer be practised in the world without a thrill of horror and sympathy. Inhuman customs could not be tolerated in the name of religion. New forms of association were organized to stop war, to cure social evils, to visit the prisoner and convert prisons to a higher use, to invade the slums of great cities with friendly light, to uplift degraded peoples, to share the vast blessings of liberty and education with the destitute classes. What if these new forms of union were not always baptized under any holy name of religion? None the less they marked the advance of a new wave of religious life. This was the very life which had shown itself in ancient Judea and, by gleams, in India and

China. This was the life which had warmed Jesus' heart. As the writer of the Fourth Gospel had said, here was the "true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." This light of a common humanity, free, brave, just, friendly, must be every man's natural heritage.

I wish to make the drift of this chapter perfectly plain. For this purpose I shall now refer to the names of two illustrious men, very different in their genius, but singularly alike in their utter genuineness and humanity,—Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Huxley. Most men probably think of certain prominent ministers or perhaps the popes in Rome as religious men; they would hardly class Mr. Lincoln, who belonged to no church, as religious at all. Was he therefore not a religious man? He had an invincible faith in the eternal goodness. Whatever was right, Lincoln believed, must come to pass.

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He loved the people, as Jesus did. He had mercy, like God's mercy. He knew how to forgive, if indeed it can be said that he had any enemies. His name has become throughout the world an example of devoted and tireless public spirit and of a "patriotism" fearless of death. The words "patriotism" and "public spirit" are not to be found in the New Testament. But who candidly supposes that they are not, like justice and mercy, the very essence of the religion of good will? In short, what bishop or pope in the nineteenth century actually possessed more religion, measured in the eternal terms of faith, hope, and love, than the plain man of the people, Abraham Lincoln?

I ventured to call this chapter "From Channing to Huxley." What has Huxley to do, it may be asked, with the progress of religion in the world? I wish to emphasize the fact that Jesus' type of religion was essentially unconven-

tional. His question never was: Does a man pronounce the shibboleth? or, Does he perform the constituted ritual? or, Has he been baptized? His question was rather, Is the man genuine? Is he honest and true? Is he friendly and humane? If so, whether he said, "Lord, Lord," or not, then he was a man of the religion of good will. I hope that it will not surprise my readers too much when I say that Mr. Huxley illustrates almost a new species of faith in the world. Perhaps no man who ever lived worshipped God, under the name of truth, more devoutly than Huxley. For what he believed to be true, this man was ready to die, with a sort of passion for sincerity. Others before him had venerated dogmas taught upon authority. This man went back, at every issue, to the original question, Is it true? He believed that the universe is founded in truth. Is not this faith in truth essentially a spiritual faculty? What else can it be?



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Moreover, Huxley was religious in his fine sense of right and justice. We may accurately say that "he hungered and thirsted for righteousness." No man had less sense of fear in the presence of the mysteries of the universe. For his heart was right and friendly, and a beautiful good will possessed him. I am not saying that his nature was as richly spiritual as others have been. I merely call attention to the remarkable fact that in the progress of religious thought genuine men are everywhere coming to admit that the truth-lover, the lover of righteousness, the humane man of the type of Thomas Huxley, belongs close beside the type of Jesus; in other words, that, in the truest sense of the term, this kind of man is "a good Christian." Who that believes in God at all does not believe that such a man is a veritable son of God? Who doubts his "salvation," either on the ground of his unconventionality, or because it was

his misfortune to lack something of the enthusiasm and hope which other men, often less genuine, enjoy?

I count it, therefore, not the least gain of the century that religion has at last taken on a larger and more comprehensive significance. What was once the rare affirmation of spiritual geniuses is beginning to be the judgment of all men. We have discovered that sincerity, steadfastness, modesty, devotion, public spirit, and humanity are vital forms of religion; with this splendid discovery we are surely in the line of the great teacher who said, "By their fruits ye shall know them."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE THINGS OUTGROWN.

WE have traced through many centuries what we have figuratively called "the religion of the smoke" and "the religion of the flame,"—in other words, the religion of sacerdotalism and the temple, as compared with the religion of the spirit and of good will. We have found these two types of religion close together and interwoven, often coexisting under the same name and in the same church,—yes, even in the same life. In one sense they appear opposite or hostile to each other. They are as opposite as civilization and barbarism or as truth and error. But in another and truer sense, they are opposite only as the smoke is opposed to the flame. The smoke is a process in the evolu-

tion of the flame: it comes partly from unintelligent stoking, it represents the inefficient quality of the fuel, it represents a low energy in the fire. So with every barbarous, irrational, or inhumane form of religion.

Real religion, indeed, like art or science or life itself, is always good; but the form of the religion is bad, exactly as in the case of art, whenever the human nature behind it is ignorant, sensual, and selfish. The forms of religion are bad as long as the flame of good will and humanity is still low. Thus Christianity ceased long before the fourth century to be any longer the "religion of Jesus," because there were not men enough to propagate such a religion. Thus the mediæval church became the church of the papacy and the inquisition, because the human material which composed and directed the church was more barbarous than civilized. Thus, again, to-day the religions of

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creed and ceremonial are undergoing a marvellous change, and a new and free form of religion seems to be coming in like the spring-tide. This is simply because, in the mighty secular process of spiritual evolution, there is more heat and light in the world than there ever was before. Increase the power of the fire, and the smoke, becoming continually less dense, is at last consumed. The eternal law of the world is that evil must be overcome by good.

We must have satisfied ourselves by this time that there never was and never could be "a conflict between science and religion." The term is a survival from the old-fashioned dualism. What men deemed conflict was only the necessary attempt of the human mind to think its religion into scientific or rational terms. The religion of a barbarous age could not fit the thought of a reasoning age. But there never was any conflict between the religion of jus-

tice and humanity,—the religion of the men of faith and hope,—and the most mature science.

We are ready to see how various religious doctrines which long burdened men's souls, which indeed fitted the period of their intellectual childhood, are quietly being disposed of, not by strife or argument, but by the genial dissolving contact of a more intelligent and humane spirit.

Take, first, the very ancient idea of propitiatory and expiatory sacrifices. What rivers of blood have flowed on account of this idea! What holocausts of cattle and sheep have been offered up! How many cries of human agony and despair have ascended with the altar smoke to turn the wrath or buy the favor of the terrible gods! How many Iphigenias and Jephthah's daughters have given their lives to win the release of their fathers or kinsmen from the penalty of their rash vows or their sins!

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Christianity itself for hundreds of years taught, only in slightly modified form, the same bloody doctrine of sacrifice. Nothing but an infinite propitiation, it was said, could appease the wrath of the Deity. And yet, long before Christ, men had known better than this. A great unknown teacher had said: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart thou wilt not despise." And when Jesus called God "our Father," and bade men forgive "till seventy times seven," the whole huge structure of sacrificial religion was predestined to pass away. Must man forgive freely, and could not God also forgive without appeasement or propitiation? Goodness must be universal and everywhere the same, like the light. God's goodness must be like the highest goodness in men. Goodness, whether in heaven or on the earth, never can desire to see men punished for their sins. It desires rather to see

men turn from their ill-will and self-will and do the deeds of beneficence. Once thus conceive of God's goodness after the likeness of the noblest goodness known among men, and all the ancient perplexities about sacrifice and forgiveness pass away.

There is in fact a new meaning of sacrifice. It is the effort and courage and cost which the life of justice and good will eternally demands and gladly exercises. Forgiveness, once a mystery, becomes the most natural act of the good God or the good man. It is an habitual attitude or temper even more than an act. It is the attitude of the physician who desires to help and cure. It is the attitude of the teacher who desires the perfection of the pupil. It is the attitude of the philanthropist who desires to save the vicious or the unfortunate. It is the attitude of the parent who never gives up a child. It is the attitude of the infinite good will which



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exists to communicate itself. To be reluctant to forgive, to be vindictive, to demand retribution, to bear hate, is indeed to be in need of forgiveness, is to be without the spirit of genuine religion or moral health. A God who demanded the punishment of mankind would not be a God whom we could worship. Thus at last the clear flame of the religion of goodness burns away the whole hideous system of the old world sacrifices. It reinterprets the facts which men once classed as "punishments"; they are no longer considered as cruel, arbitrary, and hopeless torture; they are now recognized as the necessary, natural, and beneficent conditions of moral progress and growth.

Again, the standing dread of the ancient world and of all savage races, and indeed of the conventional Christianity almost up to the present time, was the haunting presence of diabolism. Powers of darkness, gnomes, imps,

devils, witches, lurked everywhere, seeking men's hurt, till at last a vast organized underworld of mischief, ruled over by a princely Satan and sending its unseen emissaries to the remotest corners of the earth, fairly terrorized mankind. It is significant that Jesus never uttered a word to break this superstition. Can there be any doubt that he was too much the child of his age to be able to lift its spell? It is certain that his disciples were dominated by the common diabolism of their times. The New Testament is full of it. It became at last almost as dangerous to take the name of the devil in vain as the name of God.

All this diabolism, however, is gently passing away. The fact is, you cannot fairly believe in the reign of law and believe also in demoniacal agency. You cannot know anything of modern medicine, and need any longer to call in the devils in order to explain the phenom-

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ena of epileptic, hysterical, or insane mental action. Neither can you believe in a good God, rightly called our Father, and easily believe at the same time in the existence of beings totally and hopelessly evil and purposeful only of mischief. Moreover, our best modern habits of conduct set diabolism aside. We are daily learning that to apprehend or suspect evil, insult, opposition, enmity, is to manufacture evil: whereas to expect good is very largely the way to produce good. To look for witches was the way in which our forefathers doubtless discovered them. Not to expect them at all, and not to believe in them, is to have no witches. At any rate, intelligent people no longer carry on life with regard to possible devils. Even those who profess to believe in them as a matter of dogma no longer take them seriously.

Here now is an immense change, almost equal to a revolution, in the popu-

lar religion. The less people think of the devil, the less need have they of priests. Neither is this change a mere negative movement. The positive force at work is the idea of the divine beneficence everywhere present. A blind fear of the unknown powers of evil is at last giving way to the bracing and wholesome fear of breaking the unchanging but kindly laws of the universe, material, physical, mental, social, and moral.

Another tremendous cloud of superstition was the doctrine of hell. It was never in more ghastly form than in the teaching of the Protestant theology, even into the nineteenth century. And yet it contained a gleam of reality. In one sense the doctrine of everlasting punishment bore witness to the presence of new standards and ideals of virtue. The doctrine of hell was the shadow of the incoming sense of a spiritual universe. It was the first shock of the

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thought of the infinite differences between good and evil, or better, of the infinite value of goodness. Infinite evil seemed at first to be called for in order to match infinite good, the depths of hell-fire to set off in contrast the heights of heaven. This startling contrast of infinities, both of heaven and hell, terrible as it seems, was a whole range upward from a mere finite or material world, without divine values in it at all. It was grand to worship a God who could not abide a shadow of impurity. That a man deserved to be damned forever was in itself a tribute to the sense of man's importance in the universe.

It is needless to remind ourselves that this distortion of a single aspect of a truth is passing out of the thought of intelligent men. If people still read in their Prayer-books that their children are "born in sin" and under God's "wrath," they read these words like so

many sentences from the Hebrew war songs, with no sense of their ancient meaning. Modern men do not believe that, because God is infinite, man's sin must therefore be infinite, that, because the good is infinite and eternal, evil is also infinite. They believe the contrary. Modern men do not teach that our only true attitude toward God is of "miserable sinners." They teach that we should think of God as our Father, and of ourselves as his obedient children. The democratic idea will not let us believe that neighbors and kinsmen and friends can be divided from one another by an impassable gulf to all eternity.

The fact is, in the old times men easily believed in hell and endless punishment, because they were used to the sight of torture, and were quite willing themselves to punish their enemies forever. The belief in hell was of a piece with "man's inhumanity to man." But

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this belief vanishes from men's hearts as fast as they become humane. They cannot imagine that God would be more cruel than they would be themselves. In short, the more civilized a man is, the less does he need a prison-house for his enemies. The truly civilized man has no enemies. Treat men, he says, like the children of God. In this teaching, hell disappears.

This disappearance of an ancient teaching has not come about through a process of negation nor through the loss of precious moral sanctions. It has come, first of all, to the men foremost in virtue. It has come, as we have already seen, through a new and profounder sense of the meaning of goodness. It has accompanied a spiritualization of the thought of God. It is precisely because God is good that we cannot conceive of his punishing even evil men forever. In fact, we are coming to see the meaning of sin and evil in a new light. Evil

is like a shadow or a cloud. No evil thing has permanence in the universe or even valid existence. It is not so much a form of life as it is the want of life; or, if some forms of life seem to be evil, it is because their life is as yet partial and immature. This follows as soon as men fairly believe in the single sentence of the Lord's Prayer which calls God our Father. No father maintains a penitentiary. A divine universe, however immense its law of cost or however it may use pain as a means to an end, never uses it as an end in itself. The universe cannot exist half good and half evil. Its whole texture at last must be shown to be good, and what we call evil must be seen in view of the grand plan of the whole to be involved in the processes of growth. Thus, as surely as this is God's world, the doctrine of hell logically goes the way of the diabolism and the witchcraft. All dualism disappears at the thought of a universe.



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Another ancient idea which is passing away is that of an infallible or supernatural authority in the shape of a priesthood or a pope or a plenarily inspired Bible. There is no settled authority in religion which can save men from the duty, or rather the privilege, of investigating and thinking. Authority in religion, in fact, is exactly like authority in every other field of thought. It is never absolute, but it is established through the growing agreement or consensus of the competent; that is, of the most thoughtful and religious. We smile at the arrogance of ancient priests in Egypt or Jerusalem who claimed authority over men's consciences. We are also coming to smile at the pretensions of modern priests. History is full of the strange aberrations and vagaries of all kinds of ecclesiastical authority. Even the pope does not venture to use his supposed infallibility. It is not the heretics who are now telling the world

the truth about the Bible. Orthodox scholars, like Harnack of the German State Church and Cheyne in the Established Church of England, are proclaiming what kind of a book the Bible is. When did it ever profess to be infallible? All will enjoy its grand passages the more for being relieved of the supposed duty to admire and believe everything in it. Why indeed do any ministers hesitate to say what they know about it, and so to make the Bible a more real book?

With the truth about the Bible once frankly admitted, a whole cluster of ancient creedal dogmas vanish. They never indeed had any foundation except in "proof-texts," often misunderstood, or in the curious record of the traditions of folk-lore. What pathetic dogmas about original sin and "elect infants" trace their origin back to the simple legends of Genesis! Does any one wonder how the world can ever rid

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itself of sectarian divisions? The answer to this problem touches the true character of the Bible. The sects are founded on misapprehensions about the Bible. I reserve for another chapter the most interesting and important illustration of the mischief that has been made by this species of error.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE GREAT SHIBBOLETH.

OF all the dogmas which have prevailed by reason of the misuse and misunderstanding of the nature of the Bible and through an exaggerated opinion of the supernatural inerrancy of the writers who made it, the time-honored doctrine of the Trinity has perhaps caused the greatest intellectual difficulty and confusion. This doctrine in some form has been the great shibboleth of ecclesiastical Christianity. It is an interesting fact that the best modern thought in religion contains more and not less of spiritual reality than was ever believed under the Trinitarian formula. The modern Jew or the advanced Unitarian, like James Martineau, believes at least as much about God as ever Athana-

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sius believed. Modern religious men thus include in their conception of God the idea of the Father, as the source and origin of being. They hold equally that the divine goodness and righteousness, so far from being unknowable or unlike human goodness, must be like the human goodness, which obviously proceeds from it, as water from a fountain. In other words, they hold that there is in God what we call a human aspect, and in man what we call a divine nature. Is not this all that was ever believed under the head of the "second person" of the Trinity? They also hold that we best worship God as spirit, or, in other words, that he is a present and living God, not a dread and absentee Lord. All power, beauty, order, goodness, mercy, wherever seen, is the witness of the activity of the One God, whom no name may wholly describe. Especially do men know God wherever they live the life of good will.

As the old writer said, "Whosoever loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." Was there ever any other significance than this in the conception of the "third person" of the Trinity?

I am not trying to argue that modern men believe in the Trinity. On the contrary, this dogma has become an impossible test of religious reality. As a dogma, no one ever understood it. As a matter of history, whoever has tried to explain what it meant has immediately fallen into some form of "heresy." The multitude in all times merely said it because they were so taught. They might have repeated so many Arabic words as intelligently. At no time does the dogma appear to have made the people better who possessed it. Jesus and his immediate disciples lived the good life together without ever having heard of it. In fact, while it has always been an easy shibboleth for the ignorant and even for the immoral,

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many of the noblest men and women have never been able to pronounce it at all. Is God wherever goodness, modesty, justice, and mercy are? Then the dogma of the Trinity dissolves in a larger and more vital unity. It is true that men still reverently repeat the ancient words, but their words are like the conventional shutters which in a certain very conventional city men still hang at their windows. They know that the use of these shutters has passed away, but they still keep them because the hinges are there.

The dogma of the Trinity is in reality the cover which serves the single purpose of maintaining the conception of a divine Jesus. The life of Christianity, men have said, is in the deity of Jesus. I have no wish to minimize the influence of Jesus in history. No life has carried such an inspiration for the making of righteousness and good will. Here at least in one man, if in no other,

it was said, could be seen the life of a son of God. Nevertheless, it is certain that this immense and beneficent influence of Jesus' life has not depended upon what men called him. Those who knew him best personally did not call him God or think of him as God. The overwhelming majority of those in every age who have called him God, as we have shown, have been the votaries of the religion of the temple, and have not believed in Jesus' simple religion at all. By the subtle instinct of self-preservation the priestly class, and not the men of peace and good will, have always been most strenuous to insist that Jesus should be enthroned as God above the common humanity. The persecutors and inquisitors have been the most vehement defenders of this doctrine. Where to-day tyrants sit on thrones, where armies are sent out with priestly blessings, where superstitions are densest, where partisan politics are most



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demoralizing and public spirit is low, where business methods are most unsocial, there you will find men most tenacious in holding that Jesus' life was the life of a God, and not of a man.

Must it not be admitted that the doctrine of Jesus' deity has lost whatever measure of inspiration it may be conceded to have once involved? To call Jesus' life the life of a deity is to draw a depressing line of separation between him and all others. It is to imply that Jesus lived by a rule which for mere men is impracticable. It is to constitute an ideal or "religious" life, apart from man's actual and practical life. The doctrine of the deity of Jesus acts to-day as a soporific to set men at rest from doing the very things which the man of the Golden Rule and the Beatitudes bade his friends do.

The deity of Jesus is not passing away by any mode of denial or negation. It disappears through a larger faith.

Do you believe that God is our Father? Do you believe that we all share the same nature which was in the prophets and the heroes? Is it true that we are "of one blood," and thus in a true sense brothers? Is it, therefore, in all of us to live the life of children of God? Then we do not deny that Jesus was a son of God and thus divine. We say more: we say the same of every one who shows a gleam of righteousness or of good will in his life. Wherever we see goodness, we see the face of God. We do not believe less of the deity incarnated in manhood than others. We believe in more of deity to be revealed in the world than has ever been seen. Else this world cannot be God's world. Liken the beauty of Jesus' life, if you please, to the largest diamond ever seen. It may be that no diamonds will ever be found so large as the great Kohinur of Eastern kings, but the time comes on apace when every one can see or even

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possess a diamond. Thus the narrow and exclusive idea of Jesus' deity is outgrown, because something larger and more inspiring is already taking its place. Every noble biography, and every honorable, good life as well, makes us believe in the deity of manhood, and stirs us to be worthy of the divine heritage common to all men.

This teaching is very radical. Let us be certain how far it goes, for many say that the good life at least consists in "following Jesus." I shrink from hurting any gentle associations or reverent sentiments. I know how the words "follow Jesus" are made in many minds to stand for a beautiful human ideal. They mean, Do what the most perfect man would do. I urge, as a fact, that we modern men cannot possibly "follow Jesus." We cannot actually imitate his conduct. We do not know him well enough. What is more, our responsibility, as men, is not to imitate any man,

even the highest. The problems of our modern life are not the same as Jesus' problems, as our science is not the same. Our charity, for example, cannot be like his charity in simply giving alms to the poor. We have a greater duty to the poor. Our relation to government is different from Jesus' relation to the government of Rome. Our duty to the men in prison is more than to visit them and pray with them. We must see to it to-day that men are kept out of prison. There is no modern political, social, or economic problem upon which we can go to Jesus and get any precise answer. The only answer which we can render is the general answer, older than the New Testament; namely, "Love your neighbors as yourself." Is it said, We can catch Jesus' spirit? Yes. And we can catch the same spirit, which is not Jesus' spirit alone, in ten thousand living men and women, who are doing in our day what Jesus did so

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bravely in his,—marching the way of duty and truth,—quick to see and to serve human needs. We are not following Jesus only, but a magnificent procession of true-hearted men who all go the same way. If to join this procession of the men of good will is to follow Jesus, no Hindu or Jew could object. It is a procession in which no sect names of any sort divide men.

Did not Jesus, some one may finally ask, require men to give a sort of personal allegiance to himself? There is a fine answer from the New Testament to this sort of question. The disciples are said to have complained that they found certain men doing good, who would not follow their company. They went so far as to rebuke these outsiders. But Jesus, the story goes, taught them that all who did good were their friends. There could be no real division, therefore, between those who were doing the works of goodness.

How difficult this lesson still is! As if Jesus' character could be altogether lovable if there had been a tinge of jealousy in it! Or as if any true man ever cared for credit and titles for himself, provided God's work was done by any righteous means!

I have instanced examples enough to show that every ancient symbol is undergoing transformation in the alembic of our modern thought. So far as there was an element of solid metal, it is saved and made useful. So far as the material was only so much stubble or chaff, it vanishes in the flame. The religion of good will has no place for the doctrines which separated men from each other as "sheep and goats," either in this world or another. There is one race, one destiny, one movement of growth, one hope, as this is one universe. Whatever is irreconcilable with this faith is a thing for which the world can have no further use.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE RELIGION OF TO-DAY.

WE have seen that men of a pessimistic turn of thought have again and again at different epochs of human history asked the anxious question, "Is not the world growing worse?" In fact, the pessimists have always thought the worst of their world in the very times when the noblest of men — Jesus, Savonarola, Zwingli, Fox, Wesley, Channing — were lifting up new standards. For the entrance of light always discloses the darkness and makes demand for more light. It is with this thought as our clew that we may undertake to interpret the signs of our own times.

It is not strange that conventional minds in every church are alarmed about their religion. They had thought

that religion was the same "yesterday, to-day, and forever." They had thought that it consisted in certain fixed forms and doctrines. There is not to-day a form or a doctrine of religion which is not known to have grown through various changes to its present shape. Every rite or article of faith has been proved to fall under the same law of variation, through which all life upon this planet proceeds. The form and the statement of religion change, because religion belongs to the nature of life; and life is always taking on new forms. It is because of the freshness of the life of religion, and not because of its decay, that it is outgrowing every conventional mode which men once knew it by.

It is necessary to be quite frank here. Men have often said, "Back to Jesus," as if human history in any department could ever return on its path! We might as well say, "Back to Columbus!" or "Back to Aristotle!" or "Back



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to Homer!" True, all the great names and all great works are a perpetual inspiration. But this is because the word of the masters is one word: that word is, "Forward!" They all bid us in our day do our bravest and most sincere work, as they did theirs. They kept their faces to the front, and not backward; and they urge us to do likewise. They tell us, as Jesus is said to have answered the men of his time, "Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" The greatest of them leave no precise words to bind the freedom of our spirits. Their teachings are great because they are universal, like the Golden Rule, and will not therefore lend themselves to the restrictions of scribes and Pharisees.

It used to be said that there were certain easy marks to distinguish the true Catholic faith. "*Quod semper, ubique, ab omnibus.*" Whatever had been always taught, everywhere, and by all the

teachers, must be the true faith. We accept this test for the religion in which we believe. We search for the men of every age and race who have loved what every one calls "the good life." We ask, What have all these in common? What is the secret of their beautiful quality? Grant that they reach toward the ideal of the perfect life with varying degrees of completeness,—on what lines do all converge? The great vital elements wherein the best men agree must make the universal religion.

First, all good men contribute together to establish certain common essential elements of goodness. They all point toward a common type; that is, they live with more or less closeness of approach to each other, as if goodness, justice, mercy, and good will were the supreme facts in the world. They tend to live and behave as men would all live and behave if they conceived of themselves as sons of God. They do right,

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as if right were an infinite obligation. I am not saying that such true-hearted men are always conscious of God. I only claim that the noblest of them, whether conscious or not of God, have actually lived after a divine manner. The religious conception is that goodness is at the heart of the universe. These men have lived in a way that exactly corresponds with this conception. This conception explains them; and they too explain and illustrate the conception. Does anything else explain this order of lives?

I am not troubled that occasionally such men have denied the conventional God, and thought themselves atheists. Better not confess God, and yet live as if God were, than to confess a bad God, or a God in whom one does not honestly believe.

I have no interest to insist upon any claims for the unique character of Jesus. There can be no reason for expect-

ing any other uniqueness in the good life than we find in art or literature or any department of human genius. But we may safely say that Jesus' name serves better than any other one name to mark the modern type of a reverent, religious, and at the same time glad-some, unselfish, and humanitarian type of goodness. Add the essential Hellenic element, the desire for beauty, harmony, and unity; add the characteristic modern qualities,—the love of truth, public duty, and the keen sense of this life and this present world as real,—and we have a unified ideal of the good life, toward the creation of which a long procession of the most illustrious lives have converged. Call this type "Christian," if you will, with a fuller sense of the name than it has ever yet borne. Whatever you name it, it is doubtless the fruitage of the universe. No one name is enough to describe it, as surely no single life has created it.

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I go on to say that our ideal of the good life actually proceeds from and tallies with a marvellous thought of the universe. The conviction is everywhere gaining ground that this present universe, material and spiritual alike, is all of a pattern, the work of one creative intelligence, the revelation throughout of a single beneficent purpose. I am not saying that all the ancient teachers were sure of this. We may not be able, for instance, to prove that Jesus' mind was free of the dualistic notion of his time. Yet this faith in the one and victorious goodness underlies Jesus' teaching. It is present in the noblest utterances of a time earlier than Jesus. Paul's greatest words are based upon it. The great Stoics approached it. The world waited for modern science to bring to it all manner of startling corroboration. Darwin and even Herbert Spencer have contributed to the structure of the most rational modern

thought of religion. Does the school of Haeckel seem to prove the opposite? The short answer is that Haeckel's interpretation of the universe does not and cannot make any sense of the moral and spiritual facts in which the very significance of human life consists. It is like an interpretation of a problem in algebra into terms of the minus sign, where at every point the problem demands the positive sign in order to give proper significance to the answer. So the moral or spiritual answer to the problem of the universe matches at every point, as truth ought to match, with the moral or spiritual facts in the life of men, and especially with the facts which characterize the most perfect lives, the fruitage of the universe. In short, the great word of the age is that this is a divine universe, where without and within all things work together to produce goodness; that is, to manifest and develop noble personality.

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Again, the facts of universal experience tend to show that heaven, or the happy life, is not so much somewhere else as it is here and now. If God exists, he is here. If this earth is not of the structure of God's universe, we have no reason to believe that there is such a structure anywhere. Indeed, the heroes and the prophets have always carried heaven in their hearts. Where they have been, they have made heaven. They have always taught the secret of "the happy life." The profoundest of the teachings of Jesus was that heaven, or "the kingdom of God, is within you." In all times the man who has conceived that he shared the nature, the thought, and even the purpose of the spirit of the universe has had no fear of change or pain or death. The body might suffer or perish, but the intelligence or personality tenanted the body was of the eternal nature. The men who have caught this idea have been men of in-

vincible courage and hopefulness; like true sons of God, they have got closest to the powers, the secrets, and the life of nature. They have actually been pioneers, discoverers, missionaries, educators, leaders of men. When was a man ever rendered less, and not more efficient by reason of his faith in the living God? That man alone has power who carries in his heart a valid hope of bringing about in this world the happier age. The most striking sign of the times is the common expectation of human progress among all kinds of men and the convergence of men of different sects in efforts toward the rule of righteousness and good will in our earth. The vital men in every church and religion hold that the establishment of "the kingdom of heaven" is precisely what we are to help accomplish. The idea of the kingdom of heaven and the hope of human progress are found to be one.



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The thought of this world here and now as God's world removes from historical Christianity whatever taint of asceticism has hitherto prevailed in it. The notion that this is a "lost world" disappears: the type of character suitable to a lost world disappears too. Not that there is not often enough occasion for tears and sympathy, not that life is not very costly, strenuous, and solemn; but the note of the good life is hearty and joyous, as of the free citizen of a divine world. As I have already suggested, our modern ideal comprehends the best of the Hellenic type as well as the noblest Hebraic. We frankly preach not merely the praise of the meek or gentle, but also the praise of the brave and the adventurous. We, who call war a survival of savagery, nevertheless see the perpetual need of friendly courage and daring to assure and maintain a peaceable civilization. We do not praise the man of sorrows

and sacrifice so much as the man of gladsome, hearty humanity, whose joy and hope transcend disappointments and personal loss, and whose good pleasure it is to serve and toil and give for his love's sake. This ideal of life as good and not evil is as yet almost new to many who count themselves Christians, but all the great genuine teachers at least point to it. Even Buddha showed in the case of his own life, that it is possible to attain satisfaction in this present world.

Again, the universal religion must be democratic, to fit the prevailing expectation of the prophets of all times. We found fault with Roman Catholic Christianity in that it interposed a priestly caste between the heart of man and God; it divided its world into priests or "the religious" and the laity, and it made a further division between Christians and others. We found fault with most of the great Protestant churches because

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they also divided men into opposite camps, as if Christians were a superior people, merely by virtue of their name. How astonishing that the story of the Good Samaritan has been so rarely understood in Christendom. If men have any sort of respect for Jesus' teaching, how can they set aside his highest teaching,—namely, that all men are brothers and of one nature? Is it not also true that we are as yet only children? The fact is that, like children the best men are good only when the spirit of good will possesses them. The most respectable Pharisee, when he loses his temper, or becomes arrogant and despises the weak, or overreaches his neighbor, is on the same level with other sinners, and may even be a more dangerous citizen.

The religion that is shaping itself anew to-day treats men alike and knows no privileged classes. It aims to reach all men, to be patient with all, to help and lift all, to communicate light and

warmth and establish human brotherhood. It aims at a fairer distribution of the material wealth of the world, in order that millions of toilers may have the moral and spiritual opportunities which are their just heritage. The old religions made their appeal to men's senses, and sometimes to their love of beauty. You had experienced religion, if at some gorgeous cathedral service you had been thrilled with the music and the movement of the multitude. The new religion is not satisfied with a stir of æsthetic emotion, however devotional it may seem. The larger religion indeed comprehends in itself all wholesome feeling, uses all men's senses as holy, gives the name of worship to the mysterious thrill of gladness uplifting men's souls in every gleam of pure beauty or goodness, whether inside or without a church. But its grand test and demand is ethical. Does your feeling leave you obedient, reverent, modest, friendly, humane?

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Does your religion express itself in the deeds of good will? Only the pure in heart can really see God. But who are the pure in heart, except those who live the life of peace and good will?

The old religions recited creeds or taught catchwords which distinguished their adherents. Names divided men from one another. They were religions of the letter: you must perform certain rites, you must be baptized with more or less water, you must say certain holy words. The new religion is of the spirit. It is comprehensive and universal. Who is it that lives the friendly life? Who is earnest, just, reverent? Who obeys conscience or answers back in sympathy at the call of human needs? Who meets you in the spirit of the common humanity? The spirit of humanity is the spirit of God. Whoever loves, or has good will, "is born of God and knoweth God." This grander life of the spirit, like a rising

tide, sweeps over the little barriers that have kept good men apart. There is only one religion. There has never been but one real religion, and that religion is "to be good and do good." This is God's life, and it must be man's life. Is it conceivable that any one can think it disloyalty to Jesus or to any other master to say this? It is the supreme thing which all the masters have proclaimed.

Does some one say that we have conceived of religion now in such large terms as to weaken all bonds of devotion to it? The old religion had a flag and a chief for the very name of whom men were ready to die. What have we now that men might care to die for? Men doubtless asked the same kind of question when our fathers cast off the yoke of allegiance to kings, and bound their separate colonies into a common country. Where would sentiment be in the New Republic? What would

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take the place of the old feudal loyalty? How could a nation of a hundred millions follow a common flag? Grandly the nation has answered this question again and again. The democracy shows no sign of the loss of the sentiments of chivalry and devotion.

The fact is, there were never so many men and women willing to die for their religion, and (what is better) to live for it, as there are to-day. Men once died for a dogma which they did not even understand. Men to-day give their whole lives to find out God's truth. A brotherhood of men of science are committed to discover truth, and to tell it to us. It is their religion to follow the truth. Was ever a martyr's life holier than Agassiz's or Faraday's? What shall we say of the good physicians who take their lives in their hands, like young Lazear in Cuba? What shall we say of devoted nurses who serve in small-pox hospitals? The

story of the girl martyr Perpetua is no nobler than stories which we hear of these true-hearted modern women,— Sister Dora and her kind. The world grows rich in such stories,— of railroad engineers or life - saving crews, of teachers like the brave Miss Dillingham who offered her young life to found a negro school, of workingmen ready to starve for their cause or to die to save a comrade, of college girls in slum settlements, of men like Robert Dale Owen who put their fortunes at stake to teach the law of kindly co-operation in business. It was the religion of these people to help humanity. It was their faith that the common humanity is worth saving. It was their hope that a better day is coming for all men. Is not this religion of faith and hope and charity, of the love of humanity and the love of the eternal goodness, the most sublime religion for which men can live or die?



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When we say "love," however, we mean no mere vague, genial sentiment. We mean the outgo of the whole nature, — heart and soul, intelligence and will. Neither do we mean "humanity" in general terms, as if any one could love all mankind at a breath. We mean as never before a vital and practical relation to some definite part of the work of the great world. Our religion shows itself wherever we are,—in shops, offices, lecture-rooms, laboratories, wheat-fields, or on shipboard. It shines out whenever the chance comes to touch and serve human life. The new religion is almost opposite to the old religions in this respect. Religion, they said, was where God was. But God, they thought, was only with men at certain times and in chosen places, in shrines or cloisters, or in the closet, or on Sunday. We, too, say religion is wherever God is. But God is wherever man is. God is in the face and at the heart of the man. God

is even present when the man forgets God. The presence of God is not specially in the church, but it is wherever good will binds men together or a noble spirit lifts common work into worship.

We have returned at last to the profoundest teaching of Jesus. It was always like a flame burning under the old religion. It is at last coming out into clearness. It is at the heart of the religion of to-day. Jesus' idea was that life consists not in what man gets, but in what he gives. This is the most profound fact in human experience. A man's life, joy, satisfaction, is in what he can express or effect. It is in giving himself, and especially his best self,—his good will,—expression in every intelligent form of efficiency. The uninstructed or animal man asks, What can I get? And no success in getting things ever can long satisfy him. The grown or mature man, the son of God

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catching God's thought, asks: What can I do? What can I bestow? How can I serve you? He asks this with the work of his hands, with his skill, with his choicest thought, with the motion of his sympathy. The more completely he makes this question the purpose of his life, the more lasting satisfaction, rest, and joy he has and the richer the flow of his life.

If the word "Christian" in its highest sense has any present validity, it is because the world owes to Jesus more than to any one the most original and illustrative teaching of this lesson. What the discovery of the Copernican theory is in our thought of astronomy, the discovery of this truth about the nature of life is in the development of religion. In the ordinary Christianity this has mostly been concealed from view, and little taught or exercised. The religion of to-day makes this its gospel. No modern church can

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exist without it. Are you here for what you can get? You belong, then, to the old world and its religion of superstition and priestcraft. Are you here for what you can do and give and effect? Then alone can you enter the church of humanity.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE PROBLEM OF THE MODERN CHURCH.

WE have seen how many of the ideas and formulas associated with the name of religion have become outgrown, although in respectable form they still survive. We may say the same of most of the rites and ceremonies of religion. They have either lost or, at least, quite altered their ancient meaning. Thus the communion service, once a simple memorial meal, with a definite expectation of the return of the master, has become in Roman Catholic churches a stately ceremony, and among Protestants a somewhat mystical solemnity. No early Christian would easily recognize it in either form.

The institutions of religion are evidently undergoing a vast secular change.

The world is challenged with the question: Do you need these institutions? Do you believe in them? Do they speak to your conscience and your reason? In other words, Do the churches and synagogues fit modern life and thought? It is plain that we do not treat these ancient institutions as our forefathers treated them. Priests and ministers hardly attempt to frighten people any longer with ghostly terrors. Priests no longer hold secrets or wield power which other men may not use. The church is not indispensable, as it was once thought to be. The present authority and influence of the Roman Catholic Church largely depend upon the momentum of the past. How quickly its priestly sovereignty over men's consciences would evaporate, in the more enlightened parts of the world, at the exercise of even a little of its old-fashioned tyranny, for instance, at the claim of the right to set up the

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inquisition! As a supernatural church, intervening between man and God, and holding the keys of heaven and hell, the Roman hierarchy to-day merely represents the surviving mediævalism and superstition of the world. Every new discovery of the reign of law is a disintegrating influence at the foundation of the papal authority. Once the world asked, Can the church perform miracles? Now a new and very wholesome question challenges her: Can she promote just, pure, temperate, and kindly lives, and help create a better society?

Meanwhile the churches of a supernatural Protestantism are pushed every day closer toward the light where no superstition can stand. What educated Baptist or Presbyterian minister honestly thinks that "salvation" is in his church alone, or that good Catholics bear the mark of antichrist, or that an Epictetus or an Emerson or a John Morley is a born enemy of God and

doomed to His wrath? There is no special holiness or peculiar grace that inheres only in the church and that earnest men cannot find outside the church.

The practical question is whether or not church-going makes any one better; that is, more honest, friendly, and modest. Does the profession of Christianity hold a man back from wronging his neighbors? Does it subdue his pride, or cure his egotism, or possess him with a fine public spirit? The answer to this kind of question is rarely satisfactory. There is no close or vital relation evident to-day between the hour of church worship and the daily life of busy men. Most church members fail to take their religion seriously or to believe that their ideals are practicable in the actual business of the world. On the contrary, in every community the man to whom you turn for neighborly kindness or the bravest form of public



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service is as likely to be outside the pale of church membership as within it.

How now about the character of the ministers of churches? Probably they were never, on the whole, better men than they are now. Are they, however, conspicuously more generous, devoted, high-minded, and fearless than other men of an equal grade of education? By the Protestant theory they hold no vantage ground of authority over other men. The modern study of the Bible has taken away whatever ground of superiority they were once supposed to possess by virtue of their Biblical learning. What if their greater opportunities of education and leisure give them no exceptional moral or spiritual leadership?

Moreover, Protestant churches are behind all the modern methods of organized efficiency in their wastefulness, both of men and resources. You will see a dozen struggling and competing

churches in a single town. The time was when men at least imagined that great vital issues separated these rival congregations. But no intelligent person to-day cares for the stale dogmatic issues which constitute sects. The very ground of sectarianism is slipping away, while the sectarian divisions that still keep men apart inflict needless taxation to support the increasing ministerial charges of dwindling churches, and tempt their people to resort to questionable methods of the market-place for filling the church treasuries. After paying the cost of the church, what have they left for the growing humanitarian needs of our time? No wonder that practical business men want to know of what use it is to open a great building and support a preacher for two or three scantily attended services,—perhaps only one, in a week? Is there any supernatural virtue in listening to a sermon for half an hour on a Sunday

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morning? What if the sermon does not stir a thrill of noble or humane feeling? Because our forefathers held it a duty to hear an exposition of what they deemed "the Sacred Word," does it follow that men for all time must hear a weekly homily in order to insure the good life for themselves? I ask these questions for a serious purpose, and not to make objections against the church. Such questions are being raised. They demand an answer.

It is said that men ought to go to church to worship God. This statement reminds us that the very idea of worship is changing. Worship was once in gifts at the altar, in incense, in chants and adoration. It was in saying prayers and singing hymns and bowing the head. Does the master of life care for such worship? Jesus seems to have been the great sceptic of his day as to the uselessness of merely formal worship. Is it a good God in whom we

believe? Then what pleases God must be the moral attitude or temper befitting the children of a divine universe. We have already seen what this temper is. It is just, considerate, friendly, generous, truth-loving, reverent, humane. As Jesus tested men's religion by asking, Are you willing to forgive? so we to-day make trial of our spiritual health with the question, Have we friendly good will in our hearts? To be just and to love our neighbors is to be one with God. Does the church distinctly help men to come into this sort of communion?

There was an actual peril in Jesus' time that men, having performed their sacrifices in the temple, would think that they had thus completed the duties of their religion. It is still the peril of prevailing church worship. Perhaps the traditional gap between that which is called "worship" and all that constitutes the life of men was never more marked

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than it is in the popular religion of Christendom. Most men still surmise that religion is only a remote department of life, and not, as the great teachers have held, the supreme interpretation and vital principle of life. Religion with many belongs to the realm of æsthetics. The very name of the church carries to most minds an idea of a certain aloofness from the concerns of the world. And this is true, even despite the efforts of earnest men who demand a new, rational, and more vital order of church. The ancient momentum runs still even in "liberal" and "Unitarian" churches. The lines of the old ecclesiasticism and ceremonialism survive in such churches. Their members and their ministers also do not yet always see the enormous differences between the old and the modern conceptions of worship and religion.

I am drawing no pessimistic sketch of the religious situation of our times. The truth, indeed, is that the life of

veritable religion has altogether overflowed the channel of the church. If the noblest spiritual forces were once mostly to be found in the Hebrew synagogues, and, later, in the early brotherhoods or clubs of Christian believers, the conditions of modern society are now developing and organizing moral and spiritual force in the most unexpected quarters. Innumerable societies, for example, have been organized for co-operation in all kinds of human advancement,—for various phases of temperance reform, against war and for the promotion of arbitration among nations, for the better housing of the poor, for an enlightened treatment of crime, for the education of millions of the children of slaves, for the enfranchisement of women, for the pure and unpartisan government of cities, for establishing humane relations between employers and employed, for more just laws in relation to the distribution of wealth.

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Unselfish men and women are setting up centres of civilizing effort in the midst of tenement-house districts in New York and Chicago, or again in the backward country districts. The spirit of humanity is in these enterprises; a faith in the victorious goodness inspires them; they unquestionably tend to lift the men and women who are engaged in them into a sense of a universal relation to which their lives belong; they often carry with them the solemn thought of an infinite obligation; they are essentially religious. Hardly any church is so close a brotherhood as are many of the philanthropic and humanitarian societies. They exist to do the precise work which churches profess to pray for; namely, to establish the kingdom of God in the world. Their members get constant practice in all the virtues by which you measure the contents of religion. They learn to love and respect one another and to be patient and friendly in

the face of opposition and difficulty. If they do not always pray with their words, they pray with their energies and their will. They are inspired with nothing less than the conviction that goodness and progress are in the eternal structure of the universe.

Moreover, religion is now to be found more than ever before in homes and in friendship, in the lines of professional service, in fidelity to the routine duties of a vastly complex system of trade and business. It is religion, if men would but see it, for each man to accept his place in the grand order of human service. It is not a matter of merely private conduct whether a workingman is temperate and conscientious or not: many lives may depend on his action. It is a brakeman's religion to stand at his post; it is an engineer's religion to safeguard the lives of his passengers. It is the religion of the physician to serve his patients, of the good teacher



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to keep her temper and to be a good friend to her pupils. Thus, in a thousand directions of which men have never been accustomed to think, religion is coming now to mean the devotion of power or skill or life to some definite form of human welfare. The unseen power behind modern civilization is itself organizing men together as members of one family on a new and immense scale, and pressing upon them the great practical question of religion, What can I do to help make the world better? It is shaming men out of their idleness, egoism and selfishness. It heralds the day when, in the broadest sense, humanity will be the temple of God.

The problem of the modern church is a new one. There was never anything like it before in the history of religion. In the face of altered conditions, in the rapid disappearance of superstitions, in the change of the very basis of authority

from a supposed arbitrary and supernatural revelation to that same consensus of thoughtful opinion, purchased by costly experience, which prevails in all departments of life, in the rise of new methods of humane co-operation,—what will become of the institution of the church? Can it subsist without any element of supernaturalism? Or, rather, Is it needed in modern life? For centuries the church was mostly the conservative name of the column of smoke under which the fire smouldered and spread. Now that the fire begins to blaze, will the church help the flame of pure religion to burn more brightly?

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE CHURCH OF HUMANITY.

WE have seen the word "church" changing its form and meaning at various times. It was once a simple brotherhood, like a club with its president and other officers. It became a great hierarchy working the machinery of superstition. Under Luther and Calvin it largely became an agency for preaching to its adherents a system of doctrines. To little groups of men, mostly heretics, at various times it has again and again become a form of true though exclusive brotherhood, seeking to revive the ideal of the primitive community. The church has almost universally thought itself at all times to possess some sort of supernatural sanction and authority, as if God had said

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in precise words, "Ye shall maintain a church." The supernatural sanction is now passing away. Other societies or brotherhoods fill the world. Superstitions once mighty to conjure with are becoming at most the subject of a mere æsthetic or pictorial interest.

Nevertheless, millions of people still look the way of the church; few really wish to banish it from the world. A genuine and very precious sentiment is associated with it. At its best, it represents man's faiths, his hopes, his aspirations, the ideal or spiritual life. At its best, it has always stood for a trust that life is good, and that the unseen power is friendly to man. It has pointed beyond the seen and present toward an infinite reality. Even its superstitions represented the fact of a realm of unknown possibilities. Men once thought of that realm as darkness. We think of it as light. Once men divided things into the natural and the

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supernatural. We make no division. All is natural, that is, all is of law; all also is of God. However we consider it, the realm of things "unseen and eternal," the realm where justice, duty, love, and hope have their place, is that on which human existence depends. This realm is no less real to-day than it ever was. It is more intimate, more human, and more comprehensive.

May we not now dare to use the word "church" in a sense which is both new and old? May we not combine in our use of the word the ideal which the best men have always conceived in their dreams of the "City of God," with an actual and pressing need of our times? A fine sentence of Mr. Huxley's happens to express what I mean. "I can conceive," he says, "the existence of an Established Church which should be a blessing to the community. A Church in which, week by week, services should be devoted, not to the iteration of abstract

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propositions in theology, but to the setting before men's minds of an ideal of true, just, and pure living; a place in which those who are weary of the burden of daily cares should find a moment's rest in the contemplation of the higher life which is possible for all, though attained by so few; a place in which the man of strife and of business should have time to think how small, after all, are the rewards he covets compared with peace and charity. Depend upon it, if such a Church existed, no one would seek to disestablish it."

Is it not possible that the time has come for a kind of church such as is here described, a church to which Abraham Lincoln might have belonged, a church large enough to include a Boëthius or an Epictetus? So far as we have any acquaintance with Jesus, is it not certain that he would have gladly joined hands with us in the establishment of a church of humanity?

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We are not merely making out a plausible case in favor of having a church. A great social, moral, and spiritual necessity is upon us. Everywhere the ancient struggle is on in the world between the animal forces that still make toward barbarism and the forces that press toward civilization. Is it not evident that there is as yet no truly civilized people or "Christian" nation? The majority of the millions of the world are still held in the bondage of ignorance and superstition. The emigration to the United States is mainly from races whose minds have hardly been more than superficially touched by the spirit of civilization. The United States contains an immense citizenship of backward people, "our contemporary ancestors," as they have been called. Let no one fondly dream that we have more than begun to work out the problem of a successful democracy in this country, not to speak of the ideal of self-government in South

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America, in Russia, in Austria and Spain.

We have not even learned how to use our costly public school system so as to educate our youth to be loyal and incorruptible American citizens. Willing though they may be to fight for their country, they hardly begin yet to conceive what it is to be honest and unselfish for their country, to put aside their prejudices and partisanship for the common good. Great cities and states are in the hands of men by whom the people, though reared in the public schools and members of countless churches, permit themselves to be plundered. Men of college education are in the great partisan rings which have usurped the name of popular government. The ethics of trade is to get all one can. What Sunday-schools give any effective meaning to the Golden Rule? Militarism and the pride of empire are in the air over all the world. Who knows how



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secure the rampart is that civilization has yet been able to rear against the waters of the ancient barbarism? There was never a more stirring time in which to be living, or a more "heroic age." There was never such a call for a revival of ethical religion. But this means a church: it means co-operation. The time has gone by when isolated individuals can accomplish much. It is an age of "trusts" and "syndicates." The real church is the syndicate of the good. It was never possible before. It is now coming to be a necessity. All things now work together to call it into being. We are not merely the spectators in the majestic processes of evolution; we are the active and personal participants in these processes. It is given to us to be in a real sense "coworkers with God" in bringing evil to naught and making goodness triumph.

Let us imagine a modern community

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where the conventional creedal or ceremonial churches have lost their hold. Their services have become perfunctory; thoughtful men are not interested by their preachers; the teaching of their Sunday-schools is found to be formal and antiquated. The ridiculous attempt to keep the churches as a social club, marking a respectable class, has proved futile. Men have begun to suspect that their private pews are incongruous with the fundamental idea of religion. The churches merely survive, with a traditional sense that they have a conservative value for public morals, with a dim consciousness also of a deep need which their presence attests, and great unexplored possibilities which may still reside in the church idea.

Suppose now that a fire burns out the part of the town where the churches stand, and the community is suddenly challenged in a new form with the questions: What do you wish to do for

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the ideal and spiritual interests of this town? In what most economical and efficient way will you organize its moral and religious forces so as to secure the highest welfare and happiness of its people? The situation is somewhat as if colonists were building a new city, and were addressing themselves to the problem, What shall be the religion of our city? Let us suppose the leaders of public opinion to be open-minded and free of needless bondage to ancient customs, while truly conservative enough to be aware that the future ought to be the child of the noblest life of the past.

Let us imagine a public meeting to consider whether to build up the old churches or to organize a new and popular church, or, again, whether it is necessary to have any church. All the most earnest and public-spirited people come to this meeting. The teachers will be there, the officers and visitors

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of the Associated Charities, the members of the Municipal Leagues and other citizens' associations, the most thoughtful men in the Board of Trade, the representatives of the Labor Unions. The various temperance and other reform societies will be represented, the ministers and members of the former churches will be present.

In this supposed public meeting to consider the highest welfare of a community, you have discovered at once all that constitutes a church. Reverence, fairness, public spirit, sympathy, the most exalted aspirations and hopes are there, all ready to be fused together into co-operative action. Let some true man address these fellow-citizens. Let him appeal to them in the spirit of good will and friendliness, in the name of the common welfare, to unite in order to make their town a veritable City of God. Do not doubt that their hearts and wills will presently

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answer to his appeal, as if they were all moving together in the unison of prayer. Would not this be real prayer? Is it not prayer when men's wills march together for a common good?

Let us venture to frame a plan, not too impracticable, for a civic church. All persons of thoughtful age who wish in any form to serve the welfare of their town shall constitute its membership. It shall be a humanitarian church. All the reform, charitable, and beneficiary societies into which people have been divided shall here find a centre of union. Every member of this civic church shall designate what branch or form of friendly endeavor he chooses to be specially identified with. It will be discovered how large a force the city contains of true-hearted and willing men and women on whose good will you can count to help forward every good cause. All these shall be enrolled on the common basis of their

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sympathy and public spirit. There shall be a simple organization, with the most trusted men and women of the town at its head, unifying all other humane organizations together for better acquaintance and understanding among their members, for co-operation and greater efficiency. The Woman's Temperance Union, for example, shall no longer act independently, missing the sympathy and support of the men of the town. The municipal reformers shall no longer consist of a little group of educated men from a single ward of the city. The civic church shall establish through its friendly conferences a sort of clearing house, where men and women shall meet in the spirit of sympathy, free of egotism and intolerance, and frankly hear each other's honest differences with a view to common action. Would not this be both the spirit and the work of a church? Is not intelligent and disinterested counsel as

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truly a religious function as the saying of prayers? If men discussed together, in the manner of children of God, and as if in his presence, who shall say that this is not the very essence of worship?

Shall we not, however, provide in our civic church special services of worship? Why not? Will men ever cease to love to gather in contemplation of the vast subjects of human destiny, of the "whence" and the "whither"? Will men's souls ever fail to vibrate at the thought of that universal life in which we "live and move and have our being"? Can any human speech be so persuasive as the eloquence of him who moves men to live, and die if need be, for righteousness, for the common good, or who proclaims the citizenship of all mankind in the life of a divine universe? We have already shown that this larger faith in religion, so far from threatening to perish from the earth, was never so vital and buoyant

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as in the minds of men and women of our generation. All science urges the intelligence in the way of this sublime faith,—a faith without which science itself would be meaningless. Science nowhere finds evil powers at work. It discovers force, order, beauty, thought, life, working out the marvellous products of righteousness and good will. Men surely cannot fail to admire, to praise, to be glad, and to sing in the presence of the living God, for whom, as by an eternal instinct, their souls cry out.

But the new worship will be other than the old. The old worship was supposed to propitiate God: it was the worship of children, moved partly by fear. It left men selfish and at strife with each other. The worshipper came to his church out of his narrow individualism, and returned to his individualism again, as much an egotist as before. But the new worship is for grown men.



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It brings them together, and it welds them more closely in brotherly ties; it sends them forth to help one another. Its one test is in the promotion of friendliness and humanity. The man has not truly worshipped God who goes from his church to resume a life of selfish money-getting, to seek his own pleasures, or to compete with his rivals. It is no worship of God that leaves men indifferent to the dismal facts of war in their world, of dire poverty at their doors, of corruption undermining the political institutions of populous commonwealths, and threatening to poison the manhood of every great city. The spirit of worship is nothing less than the spirit of brotherhood.

We have said nothing yet about the most pressing necessity that requires and justifies a church; namely, the moral and religious instruction of the community, and especially of the youth. The history of mankind shows that it

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has been through the function of the church as a teacher more than in any other way that it has fostered civilization. The Jewish church will be remembered for the sake of its prophets and rabbis, when the pattern of its temple has been forgotten. The church of the Middle Ages lives still in the morality which its thinkers and teachers inculcated. The power of Calvinism was in its teaching men to think for themselves. The history of civilization has been in great measure the history of teachers of righteousness. There have been no pure homes except where high-minded parents and teachers have labored by precept and example to enforce the moral standards. Here is the vast need of our time and our nation. Men and women learn various fragments of knowledge,—history, the sciences, languages, arts; but where do they learn how to bind their knowledge into any unity or find its larger significance?

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What does it avail if a youth knows the details of a science, and yet has no conception of the majestic universe and its moral laws, or of the inner spiritual personality which it is given him to work out? In the words of the ancient questioner, "What does it profit him if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" What if the graduate of the university is mean, selfish, domineering, egotistic, in the face of the grand world which is ever asking for life, for truth, sincerity, manhood, courage, faith, humanity?

Our new church then is to be, as never church was before, a school or university. The church must bind knowledge together and show its spiritual significance. It must interpret experience and history into the highest terms, and show where the lines of a nobler evolution run. It must acquaint the youth with the most illustrious passages in literature, with the hymns

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which console in sorrow, with inspiring biographies, with the most thrilling periods in the growth of liberty, with the sublime law of devotion and cost through which our civilization has been attained, and in obedience to which men become divine. There was never such material for this sort of spiritual teaching. The Bible of the race—its record of inspired life—grows richer every day. We must so order the time of our young people as to give certain hours every week to the learning of those things which constitute wisdom.

In the old days they used to induct the youth into the mysteries of their religion. They followed a wise instinct. They took advantage of the fact that the season of youth is the blossoming time. We will keep in our new form of religion whatever was good in the old. Our boys and girls shall graduate at the age of dawning thoughtfulness out of the preparatory

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school of instruction into the complete fellowship of our church. There will be a new class of boys and girls every year who purpose henceforth to stand with their elders for all things high and honorable. We shall hold a great festival for them on some spring Sunday, and induct them into our church. When the fresh life flows at its high tide, when the heart of the youth naturally rises to new visions of activity and beauty, we will consecrate it to the solemn, joyous, and willing service of humanity.

I am already answering the question whether we shall have ministers for our new church. We must have administrators of our common activities of beneficence. For instance, we must have men and women, of the quality of the best ministers, to take charge of our reformatories, and quite to change many of the present antiquated methods in the treatment of crime. We must

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have the highest trained intelligence, thorough character, and the most disinterested spirit in the teaching force of our church. Who that does not believe in the divine universe can teach others to believe in it? Who that is not enamoured with the beautiful lives of the heroes and helpers can stir the youth to emulate their deeds?

We shall not have so many preachers nor so many sermons as our fathers were accustomed to hear. We shall not think of judging men pious or not according to their patience in hearing discourses. Why should the same preacher be expected to speak every week to the same people? If he has that which is important, he should say it to other congregations. If he has nothing important, he ought not to speak. The special danger in preaching is that men who hear go away and do nothing in consequence. Preach-

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ing as a form of oratory ought like other oratory, to go with great occasions. When the city or the nation is embarked on an unrighteous course, when war threatens, when passion or class feeling is aroused, when subtle temptations creep in upon a people, then the voice of the great preacher, like the prophets of old, should be heard. Then the people should throng their church as men went to the great Duomo to listen to Savonarola, until a tidal wave of moral health and reason brings the evil to naught. For the most part, however, I believe the need of the world is not so much in formal preaching as in a nobler and freer order of teaching.

We have assumed that our civic church must have its appropriate buildings or meeting-houses. They shall be partly for the beneficent activities of the people,—the meeting places of societies,—work-rooms and class-rooms and

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reading-rooms, rooms for boys' clubs and girls' clubs, with at least one great public hall or cathedral. There is no reason why the buildings should not be beautiful. They may have appropriate decorations; there may be noble sentences on the walls, with pictures and busts of the masters and heroes.

It will be asked how we should bear the expense of our civic church. In a thoroughly civilized community there could be no reason why we should not make this expense a part of the municipal expenditure, along with the rest of the appropriations for the welfare of the people. Sectarian or supernatural religion ought not, indeed, to be made a public charge. But a popular, rational, and natural religion may yet be found to be as necessary to the public life of a city as a supply of pure water. For the present, however, we shall rely on the purely voluntary method of support. It is easy to raise money, provided the ex-



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pense meets an actual need, does obvious good, and appeals to the chivalry of men. Show fair-minded people how much money is needed, discover approximately what the total income of their whole number is, tell them what percentage of this income would amply cover the estimated expense, and then test their religion by asking every one to assess himself his just and generous share of the whole. Who knows that you might not prove to carry over an annual balance in favor of a church which taught men the religion of trust in place of a religion of fear and suspicion?

We have reserved a difficult question. What shall we do with those of our neighbors who wish to perpetuate the old sectarian differences,—Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and the like? Perhaps there will not be so many of these as one might at first expect. We have given their people an idea of some-

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thing richer and more humane than a waning sectarianism. We will make all groups of denominationalists, however, partners in one larger federation. They shall have the use, like our other civic societies, of the common buildings. They shall be challenged to test the value of their religion by an equitable agreement with each other in the choice of rooms and the hours of using them. Each group, moreover, shall be requested to provide special services, open to all, in the common meeting-houses. They shall have full opportunity, if they can, to persuade the whole town to become Baptists or Methodists with themselves. Let all sectarianism thus come out of its exclusiveness, and stand in the light and declare its full value.

Meantime we will establish at stated times, and as often as the demand is, a beautiful "cathedral service" in the common church. There shall be the noblest music which can stir men's

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hearts, there shall be grand hymns sung by the whole congregation. The people shall be made familiar with readings of the greatest words, ancient or modern, which promote the sense of brotherhood, faith in God, courage, and hope. Chosen speakers shall also at times voice the aspiration of the congregation and set forth their ideals. A rule of perfect freedom shall require the speaker to utter his best thought with frankness and courtesy. Sometimes, again, all the children of the town shall be gathered on national holidays or to commemorate the birthdays of great men and noble women. Our civic church shall take advantage of all memorable occasions to teach by example the lessons of duty and to foster the democratic spirit.

We have imagined a church of humanity, wide enough to admit all good men and women, setting up no barriers, positive and constructive, warring upon

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no ancient forms of belief, putting upon no one the brand of infidel, outsider, or heathen,—a church designed to do good to each and all. I have not called this church “Christian,” because to many that word carries an idea of exclusion and dogma; but it would be Christian in spirit, for all that ever made men’s souls blaze with love would be in it. I have not urged that it should rally around the name of one person, even the highest or best; for it would revere all holy names and march in one procession with them.

I am aware that I have described an ideal church, a sort of Utopia. I am aware how far many good men are yet from wishing for such a church. Most well-to-do people are complacent toward existing institutions, however faulty, which afford them respectable social shelter and conserve the rights of property. Nevertheless, the trend of the thought as well as the urgency of the

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needs of the world is in the direction of some such new organization of its growing religious life. We may not be sure how the new order will evolve from the old. In some instances, communities long since burnt over by various forms of religious excitement seem already awaiting a fresh, rational, and genuine revival of ethical religion. In great cities, where the spirit of combines and co-operation is in the air, the workers in various charities are feeling out for each other, and drawing closer together, and unconsciously laying the foundations for the coming civic church to unite all lovers of mankind in one fellowship. Churches of different names are also coming closer together, and finding their supposed differences to be insignificant. There is a growing sense that true spiritual religion must be everywhere of one kind, and that its enemies are the same,—selfishness, inhumanity, sensualism, pride, egotism,

and conceit. Real religion must have a common purpose,—the betterment and the happiness of mankind. Good and true men are learning, as never before, to respect each other and to work for common ends. The true preachers in all churches are telling substantially one gospel,—that men are the children of God, that in God's universe "there is nothing common or unclean."

It is here that the free, or liberal, and especially the Unitarian churches have their superb opportunity. As historical churches, the mere inheritors of the early puritanism of certain Eastern States, their place is only local, and their destiny cannot be very different from that of the Protestant bodies with which they are associated. As social clubs or coteries of respectable groups of well-to-do people, the world can have no permanent use for them. As the representatives of a more genial type of theological thought, mitigating

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the rigors of the mediæval faith, their critics already tell them that their work is done. They hardly compete with the great churches alongside of them, which already begin to preach the philosophy of evolution and the higher criticism of the Bible under the safe cover of ancient and familiar theological formulas. The great issue of our times is not theological any longer: it is broader; it is social, economical, humanitarian, democratic. Will the liberal churches see how profound this issue is? Will they choose to take the lead out of the ice floes into the sunny open sea? Their mission in every community is to establish a free church of the people and for the people. Their doctrine is unity, friendliness, co-operation. They must make each of their churches something like what the church of the future should be; they must be at the front in every movement of reform and human achievement;

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they must stand for civic service and public spirit; they must trust God and learn to trust man; their ministers must be known as real tribunes and friends of the people; they must set new examples in wise economy of methods, in devotion, in a sort of ethical evangelization of both city and country; they must adopt the most hearty and efficient methods of moral and religious training, and rear a noble manhood and womanhood. There was never a greater or more critical moment in the history of mankind. Who will give the service of their lives to adapt the religion of the modern world to the vast, complex, and increasing needs of modern civilization? Preach no more of Jesus, of the cross, or of sacrifice, ye who are unwilling to take up and share the very work for which he lived! Cease to shut out of your churches or to refuse to call fellow Christians those who, under any name whatever, or with-



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out name or profession, love and serve the common humanity. Who, in modern terms, is "the Christ," if it is not the ideal man hidden in the soul of every little child born into the world?

We have traced the slow growth of the life of religion as it came like a glimmer of fire into the dead world. We have watched it spread and grow; we have ceased any longer to wonder at the smoke, the terror, the superstition, the sensuality. This was not the fault of the religion: it was the primitive animalism and barbarity; it was the want of religion,—that is, of good will ruling men's lives. We have looked on at the great periods of religious revival, and seen the flame flare up and seize on the new material cast on the pile by the Master of the work. We have seen the darkness fall back and the light grow. Superstitions have given way. The evil powers have been defeated. There is, indeed, we discover, no evil or

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malign force anywhere; death itself is no punishment, but the wise order of nature; no hate is behind it. There is no cruelty except the cruelty of man in his ignorance and childishness. The one interpretation of science that gives any sanction or justification to morality is that which declares the victorious presence of a spirit of goodness and life ruling the world.

We stand at the threshold of a new age. A new, free, and glorious faith shines into the world. It is compounded of reason and good will. We men are at last coming to share with the great pioneers and prophets in the divine thought; we are admitted, as it were, into the secret of the divine plan and purpose; our good will is God's will; our love is his life; every throb of human sympathy is the token of his presence. To obey his laws, to grow into God's likeness, to be glad in the works of his beauty, to admire his mar-

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vellous order, to do beautiful things after his pattern, is to fulfil our nature. This is to be one with God. And because we participate like the sons of God in the life of the universe, see the infinite ideals, hear within us the call of the eternal and respond to this call, we come into the assurance of immortal life. We bear in ourselves the marks of the imperishable and infinite nature. Only think and feel, act and love, as the children of God; trust God, trust and obey the laws of his universe, and all things answer in harmonious response to your trust, and the realm of the vast unknown which encompasses us becomes radiant with light.









JAN 21 1903

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